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# AFFECTIVE SCHOOL ATMOSPHERES: An adventure through lively matters

MARK SACKVILLE-FORD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Manchester  
Metropolitan University for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

Faculty of Education

Manchester Metropolitan University

2017

I'm not just a carrier bag



# AFFECTIVE SCHOOL ATMOSPHERES: An adventure through lively matters

MARK SACKVILLE-FORD

EdD | 2017



## **Acknowledgements**

I'd like to start by giving thanks to all the students who took part in this research project. Thanks for your enthusiasm and your ability to quickly become educational co-researchers. Thanks too to the class teacher and head teacher for giving me access to your setting, despite the fact that I might not have done quite what you were expecting. You both know who you are, and you are a real credit to our education system.

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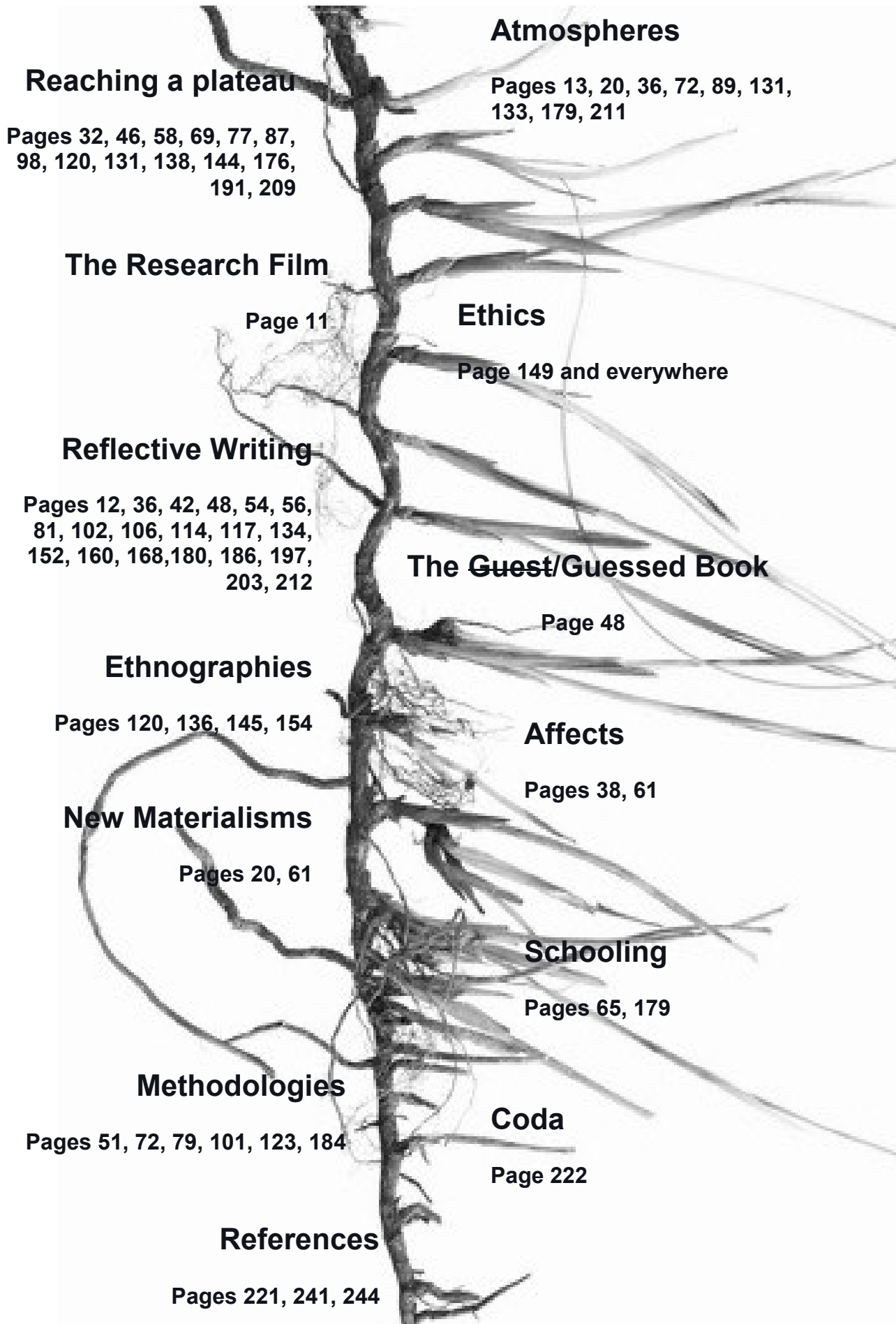
I am also grateful for Rachel Holmes for pushing me to these atmospheric places, for pointing me towards certain authors and inspiring these alternative approaches to research.

Thanks too to Geoff Bright, who with only a few short meetings was able to embrace this project. Your influence on my thinking is clearly evident in many chapters of this thesis.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to the other four Sackville-Fords in the world. Alison, Daisy, Polly and James. Thanks for your support and patience whilst I floated off into ethereal spaces.

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## Abstract

In this thesis I explore the ways that atmospheres may be conceptualized and how these function affectively within school contexts. Incorporating broadly new materialisms methodologies, drawing heavily on the work of Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari, I attempt to create an assemblage of a *becoming*-thesis. I consider potential atmospheres as 'hauntings', 'ethereal hazes' and 'vibrant ecstasies' which shimmer with their own agency. These are vibrant matters where I utilise the work of Stewart, Bennett and Braidotti, amongst others, to create a flatter ontology and consider all matter within this 'unholy mixture', including the nonhuman.

Driven by the research film that I produced alongside children, I explore the entanglements within the school environment and wonder how school may be experienced by young people. This is fuelled by a dissatisfaction with the current school agendas and the impact this has on children, and a strong moral need to care about education and childhood. Through engaging with teachers and school staff I begin the process of questioning the ordinary everyday practices, materiality and discourses that pervade schools and education.

The thesis also seeks to become atmospheric whilst resisting traditional representational models of educational research. Instead I seek an enchanting adventure through discursive and varied styles of writing. By incorporating multiple texts and writing in non-linear ways, I seek to engage with complex flows, intensities and potentialities as these constantly shift and flux. As such the reader is encouraged to negotiate an unholy mixture of traditional academic writing alongside photographs, poetry, film, personal reflective writing, and narrative story writing. These aim to act as jolts or onto-epistemological shudders hoping to mirror my own discomfort as I negotiated a doctorate in education. Both the thesis and the research aspire to be *event*-ful.

I end in a place better able to understand the complexities that exist around 'affective school atmospheres' and see that the approaches of new materialisms are a fitting way to research the indeterminable. I also begin to consider how the next steps for this research involve a political turn to generate action and revolt, to consider how we might open the void to create space to change schools.

## Dear reader

*How to start something that has no beginning nor end?  
Would a blank piece of paper be better here?  
A thesis that has aimed to play with time and space,  
To write back to front and upside down.*

*But in the end I am almost at the end of my journey  
With you at the opposite end.  
Not a start.  
You were already on your own pathway  
This thesis interrupting you momentarily.*

*It interrupted 'I'  
It shaped and changed.  
Who am I now?  
And who are you?*

*Welcome.  
Sit comfortably or move your dancing feet.  
Engage with schooled atmospheres.  
Or experience them and set them free,  
Or something else....*

Dear Reader,

It feels strange to begin my thesis by breaking the convention where we pretend that the reader is absent. The theatrical term 'breaking the fourth wall' could be re-framed in my thesis as 'ripping the paper'. Yet, the thesis becomes flaccid and redundant without the presence of a reader. Often the doctoral student will think about their supervisors and importantly their examiners, forgetting the wider audience. Whilst this immediate readership is relevant, I also hope to engage with others, including those working within my professional context. Rather than looking inward it is my aim to search towards the ever moving horizon. Together I hope that we explore our own materiality as we build a relationship throughout the piece.

Therefore, at this stage I would like to welcome you to my research and the mysterious workings of my brain. As I began to write this project it became clear to me that a written piece on 'affective school atmospheres' needed to address the complexities by *becoming*-complex. It needed to reflect the intangibility and slipperiness of terms such as 'atmosphere'. The text itself can only carry such complexities so far, and it was my wish to produce a set of affective writing and artefacts. I wished to challenge and push myself as part of the research process.

Inspired by the work of Deleuze, new materialism and post-humanism, this thesis resists the conventions of a 'typical' thesis. Instead I have often written against linear ideas of thought, producing multiple pathways through the writing and providing many plateaus on which the reader may pause and rest. I acknowledge the agency of the thesis by avoiding over-explaining my own position allowing the reader to interact and engage with my ideas and their own. I confess that the body of work is experimental. I wish to have an affective impact on the reader whilst allowing the thesis to have a certain level of plasticity.

Stewart's approach resonates with my own desire to produce work which renders the reader as productive co-producers of knowledge:

'The writing here is committed to speculations, experiments, recognitions, engagements, and curiosity, not to demystification and uncovered truths that snap into place to support a well-known picture of the world. I ask the reader to read actively – to follow along, read into, imagine, digress establish independent trajectories and connections, disagree' (2005: 1015).

Therefore rather than attempt to understand my own positioning there is space for you to co-construct me(aning). Barad brings this idea to life by describing the earthworm, who is 'helping to make compost or otherwise being busy at work and at play: turning the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunneling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it' (Barad, 2014:168). You are invited to burrow your way through this piece, to negotiate different texts and repetitions to breath new life into this thesis.

Within the thesis there is an attempt to use differences and repetition, allowing the discussion to become more or less clear (and obscure) on each facet of the thesis. Each theme that has emerged, has attempted to be a living thing that is individual-like within the whole. And while being individual the connections have threaded through, allowing different perspectives to emerge. In a Deleuzian rhizomatic way, there is always a desire to allow the thesis to ebb and flow and the routes through the various pathways to be chosen and negotiated.



This introduction therefore serves as some kind of 'health warning', like those found on a cigarette packet. 'Smoking causes blindness' or 'smoking kills'. Clearly, the impact is less stark here, but it

feels like the reader needs some warning. Maybe my warning line would be this; 'Reading this will disrupt thinking' or 'Reading this could change you'.

You will need to explore the text in ways that suit you as the reader, taking your own journey through the piece. We will need to work together to produce new knowledge. Your experience may not end when you have finished engaging with the various texts, and that is the way that I would like it to be. In William's words (2003: 79) 'it is up to each individual reader, to each individual, to detect whether these dramatisations work. According to Deleuze's doctrine of chance-driven selection, there will be successes but also failures, in his attempt to dramatise concepts, as well as to define and justify them.' I want the whole piece to have agency and I want the reader to guide their own agency. You will need to be open-minded, reflective and questioning. Take your time, allowing the atmosphere to envelop you.

'The only important thing in a book is the meaning that it has for you.'

W. Somerset Maugham

Yours faithfully,  
Mark

## The Research Film: 'Affective School Atmospheres'



'Affective School Atmospheres'

I invite you to view the research film by clicking on the link above (please contact author for film permissions). Original footage used in the film was taken during a four month period commencing in January 2015, where children in one Year 5 classroom were given iPads and time to film. I had previously given some input to support students in trying to conceptualise what an 'atmosphere' might be, how school makes them feel, and possible ways that one might attempt to show such things in the moving image. I also filmed on a separate iPad alongside these children to further supplement the film data with my own footage. Later that academic year I viewed much of the raw footage with groups of children and recorded their discussion on their reading of their footage. This helped me to gain some understanding of what children felt their film data was communicating, and strengthened the ability to co-construct meanings from these images.

A series of themes emerged from this film data and began to create a narrative around schools and perceived atmospheres within them. As I felt that there is something missing from current models of education in the UK and what the purposes of school has become, there was an aim with the film to create some space for rethinking the everyday practices of schooling. Therefore I have stitched moving images from other sources into the film, in order to begin to articulate some of the 'lack' or issues that I think are relevant.

I am excited that others will read the film in different ways and the agency of the

film itself is of interest to me. I have shown the film to a small selected group of teachers, student teachers and staff from the research school. I have attempted to evoke their responses to the film in a written reflective account, following the film, which will be explored in another chapter. The children who helped to create the film have also viewed it. The film I precede with a suggestion that what one might be expecting to watch, may not match with the actual film.

### **Silenced Piano**

**We may have been the first person to play it. I haven't seen any of [the teachers] play it. You can't miss a go on that! It is fun and shows that that you can do good things at school that you may not be able to do at home. I'm rubbish at playing the piano. It is musical and fun! But...school is not fun...school is not fun!**

**Student voices – interview data**



## Atmospheres: Becoming

### 'The Man with Night Sweats'

**I wake up cold, I who  
Prospered through dreams of heat  
Wake to their residue,  
Sweat, and a clinging sheet.**

**My flesh was its own shield:  
Where it was gashed, it healed.**

**I grew as I explored  
The body I could trust  
Even while I adored  
The risk that made robust,**

**A world of wonders in  
Each challenge to the skin.**

**I cannot but be sorry  
The given shield was cracked,  
My mind reduced to hurry,  
My flesh reduced and wrecked.**

**I have to change the bed,  
But catch myself instead**

**Stopped upright where I am  
Hugging my body to me  
As if to shield it from  
The pains that will go through me,**

**As if hands were enough  
To hold an avalanche off.**

**Thom Gunn (2009)**

Atmosphere is 'in the air', evading the ability to speak or recognise it. It hangs above and beyond objects and subjects and acts in many ways as spatially indeterminate. Bohme (1993: 114) calls this an 'ethereal haze,' having the ability to evoke 'very specific and identifiable characters (being warm, solemn, joyful, friendly, intimate, melancholy, serene etc...).' It is at the same time there and not there, noticed obliquely in the flash of an eye. Dorrian (2014: 191) suggests, we are immersed in it as it totally engages our full sensory capacities. It 'takes possession of us like an alien power.'

Even the words used to describe the atmosphere have a performativity or productive affect; an 'aura', a 'haunting', an 'apparition' or a 'haze'. The reader tends to think of something more.

Something more-than this world.

Something evocative that makes the affected have a reaction or feeling.

Atmospheres here

do not seem to be a stable or simple thing that can be labelled or easily described. Perhaps it is this that causes me to research this area in my pursuit of something else...a project that pushes me(aning) to the blurred edges. It is an attempt to do something more than conventional educational research. As the thesis develops it attempts to create new structures and whilst always in a state of becoming, it attempts to think in *pure differences for itself*. It strives to be atmospheric and affective.

Benjamin's notion of 'aura' is influential in the field as he describes the way that one breathes in the aura, absorbing it bodily. In exhalation the body has a productive affect as it changes and produces the surrounding gaseous atmosphere. An aura is 'a strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye – whilst resting on a summer afternoon – a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch' (Benjamin, 2002: 104-105). This descriptive writing begins to frame atmospheres in certain ways whilst being simultaneously evocative. It brings to mind Bohme's (1993: 120-122) notion of the 'ecstasies' of things, whereby they go 'outwards from themselves, taking leave of their formal limits to become ambiances.'

The ontological status of atmosphere leads me to question whether it actually exists. Dorrian (2014: 195) suggests *atmosphere* is a site of ontological uncertainty, 'a shifting space of hallucinatory appearances, of phantasms, imaginings and dissimulation.' These illusory notions begin to unravel research questions that attempt to capture and explain an affective atmosphere. It shifts me as the researcher towards alternative paradigms and methodologies, than those to which I am accustomed. The thesis then becomes an uncomfortable space for me to experiment and play with research into affective atmospheres. However, I attempt to embrace the discomfort in the hope of being able to open thinking with data and knowledge.

Lather's account of an experience at a conference is pertinent here, when she is challenged by an audience member who states that 'he drew the line at angels' when engaging with the work of Walter Benjamin. This was a perception that 'angels' did not warrant proper research and were somehow inappropriate. Lather (1997: 285) responds eloquently by writing about the ways that 'angels' rather than being problematic, may serve as a productive force in her writing. Indeed the angels might actually enhance her work by pushing at the boundaries of theory and argument. Here I am struck by Lather's engagement with the challenges that she faced in attempting to think and write in different ways. This 'space' of challenge interests me and I hope that my research is similarly able to 'play' in this space, attempting to generate thought, even if this challenges me and indeed the reader.

Importantly, Lather's work is challenging representation, acknowledging failures and then seeking something else. This offers a guiding light for my writing as I attempt to create a stream of writing and data that aims not to represent an atmosphere. It is doing much more (or less) than that, as I shall explore throughout this text, using repeated themes. Through attempting to write in non-linear ways, I attempt to move in discursive ways through past-present-future.

Returning to discussions on ontology, Barad (2003: 810) offers alternative ways to think and philosophise. She notes that the queerness of things means that the need to separate questions becomes unnecessary, with 'being-knowing-responding' becoming much more entangled. The inquiry around difference and affect she names 'agential realism' and her writing serves to support the idea of complications. Ultimately Barad leads us to a position where senses of mattering – ontology, epistemology and ethics – are not separate/separable considerations. This is significant in the way that atmospheres seem to fade between states and intensities resisting categorization. I consider 'atmospheres' to lack an anchor, with no fixed ground, place, time, space or matter, and this positioning warrants a different type of study. Barad offers a notion of onto-epistemology where the dichotomies are reduced to a singularity in order to allow the researcher to generate thought within an event or encounter.

Deleuze and Guattari's work, and Deleuze writing alone, has been highly influential on me and this study. Linking to this argument, Deleuze, drawing on Foucault, questioned the distinctions between 'subject-type individuations' and 'event-type individuations'. Here atmosphere becomes conceptualized as 'event-based':

'There are...event-type individuations where there's no subject: a wind, an atmosphere, a time of day, a battle...Take Foucault himself: you weren't aware of him as a person exactly. Even in trivial situations, say when you came into a room, it was more like a changed atmosphere, a sort of event, an electric or magnetic field or something....It was a set of intensities' (Deleuze, 1995: 115).

The idea of subjects and arguments around singularities will be discussed in more detail later. Here it is relevant that Deleuze understood an atmosphere as an event

of intensities. For me, the importance of Deleuze using the word *atmosphere* is particularly significant as he was beginning to philosophise with this term.

Atmosphere as a concept now seems 'adrift' forcing me to think in other ways. Its onto-epistemological status is complex and leads me to experiment with texts and concepts in queerer ways. My experience on the Doctor of Education (EdD) course has been disruptive and inspiring all at once, and my passion for producing a creative research enquiry has been released. This involves a personal desire to do things in different and creative ways, to push and challenge myself in order to avoid the banal. I agree with Barad that 'this is not about solving paradoxes or synthesizing different points of view from the outside, as it were, but rather about the material *intra*-implications of putting "oneself" at risk, troubling 'oneself,' one's ideas, one's dreams, all the different ways of touching and being in touch, and sensing the differences and entanglements from within' (Barad, 2012: 77). The processes of researching my chosen theme and the writing of this thesis are very much about this troubling and enmeshment, and this is critically important to me.

When I first began to engage with academic texts within the broad field of 'atmospheres' I was first struck by the dearth of work within an educational context. In fact my initial readings were all in the disciplines of museums, architectural or theatrical stage-design research. I was curious as to why something as seemingly pervasive as an atmosphere may be restricted to such narrow areas of research. If atmospheres are everywhere, then one might expect the research field to be brimming. Dorrian (2014) explores museums as rich site of atmospheres, with the production and regulation of an atmosphere deeply rooted in the experience of visiting a museum. These include both 'technical and affective dimensions (controlling humidity, temperature, chemical and organic airborne pollutants etc...), but also the conditions and modes of display' (Harraway, 1992: 59). Bohme (1993; 2013) explored the theatrical stage and the role of set design in evoking sensory experiences. Whilst the stage appears flat and one-dimensional there is the ability to make it function in multiple and creative ways to become for example, the sea, the battleground or the carpet. The need to create not only a visual image, but also an atmosphere is important for the audience.

During a multi-disciplinary conference I attended on 'Atmospheres' at the University of Manchester in July 2015, it became clear how many researchers

talked of atmospheres in similar ways to Dorrian and Bohme, as though they can be controlled. Concha (2015) researched the ways atmospheres may originate and flow within a pop-up street food market in London, where she drew on Bille *et al.* (2015) and their exploration of the 'staged atmosphere'. In Concha's example, a food market had populated an abandoned shopping area and reused artefacts from the shops had been discovered. It became a fashionable site for young people and 'hipsters' to congregate, which according to Concha, led to a distinct cultural feel. Images showed fires burning in old oil drum barrels, outdoor fairy lights pinned alongside colourful bunting and seating made from distressed scaffold boards. This paper provides a real and recent example of where architects and designers have intentionally attempted to shape the material environment – to 'affect people's moods and guide their behaviour for aesthetic, artistic, utilitarian or commercial reasons' (Bille *et al.*, 2015: 33). Such attempts to control an environment has obvious connections with marketing, business and PR and a sense of a potential atmosphere being hijacked in an attempt to generate income. This is pertinent within the educational arena as current agendas are leading to schools as places that require marketing, with logos, slogans and stylish websites, in an attempt to compete for pupils.



**Olafur Eliasson (2014), *Riverbed*. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art.**

The idea that an atmosphere could be so controlled and manipulated is questionable. Edensor (2015) describes the tensions between the 'real' and a staged atmosphere at the new Manchester City football Etihad stadium after they had left their old ground, 'Maine Rd'. 'The absence of the 'proper' atmosphere is said to result from a commercialization of the place, which people contrast, nostalgically, to the old stadium with packed terraces of standing crowds that had the power of stirring a 'potent' and 'thick atmosphere' (Edensor, 2015: 34). It is implied that the atmosphere may have a history and entanglement with particular places, and the commercial world might be able to subdue that atmosphere. It also links with the

fans willingness to embrace the new stadium and that their anxieties may have changed the affective nature of the space. This is a fascinating paper and it creates more avenues that are worthy of further study. However, notions of 'real' and 'proper' atmospheres seem to reduce the vibrancy of the term itself, and these do not fit with the way I conceptualize it in more intangible ways.

Writing about the atmosphere as something so fixed is concerning. The intensities of the atmosphere at a football match is far from static from one moment to the next. Something much more vibrant is needed to approach complex thinking with an atmosphere. Biehl and Locke (2010) use the word 'milieu' to consider how the social becomes part of the assemblage. These are 'worlds at once social, symbolic, and material, infused with the 'affects' and 'intensities' of their own subjectivities – and trajectories – or the journeys people take through milieus to pursue needs, desires and curiosities or to simply find room to breathe between social constraints' (Biehl and Locke, 2010: 323). I am drawn to words like 'infused' and 'trajectories', which each have complex meaning and manage to communicate the sense of tentativeness. Relating this back to the football stadium makes me suggest that the atmosphere is much more ethereal and always slightly beyond the means of control. That rather than some homogenous thing occurring across such a big space, we potentially get micro-atmospheres or localized affects.

This fits with Bohme (2013) who extends his early research to suggest that it is perverse to talk of 'producing an atmosphere' since this would signify the manufacture of something real and tangible, whereas atmospheres are more indistinct. Within the pop-up food market I wonder how those for whom the manipulation is not intended, such as the local residents or the former shop owners, experience the espoused atmosphere. I wonder how much more personal the atmosphere might be and how a shared atmosphere could be described. In the art installation 'Riverbed' by Eliasson (2014) there is a sense of staging and mood manipulation when the outdoor environment is brought into the art gallery, consisting of rocks, gravel and a stream. However, from the moment of inception it seems that it takes on further life and transcends the original staging. The installation is allowed to exist in a state of flux as people interact and change the environment, such as moving a pebble from one place to another. Maybe the atmosphere constantly shifts and fluxes and always lies just beyond control. It is as though the art space has its own agency as it engages with other objects and



subjects. I suggest this could be true of all environments and this agency is one reason that the atmosphere may not be manipulable – maybe the initial conditions are staged but then the thing itself takes over, allowing the agency to take control.

In the philosophy of Schmitz, atmospheres are located spatially ‘without borders, disseminated and yet without place that is, not localizable.’ They are affective powers of feeling and spatial bearers of mood. Schmitz considers the atmosphere phenomenologically, not through definition but through experiences. He gives examples such as a strained atmosphere in a room, an oppressive thunderstorm or the serene atmosphere of the garden. He defines feelings as: ‘un-localized, poured forth atmospheres...which visit (haunt) the body which receives them...affectively, which takes the form of...emotion’ (Schmitz, 1964: 343). The word ‘haunt’ here evokes the work of Bright on the social hauntings of UK coalfield towns. He describes how a ‘ghosted affective atmosphere’ seems to pervade and endure years after the industry has left these towns (Bright, 2016: 144). The terminology of the paranormal that such authors use, gives an interesting sense of how the word ‘atmosphere’ might get positioned as a research topic. Like Barad’s angels it is potentially dismissed as eccentric or preposterous.

*[A] ‘ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come back’*

*(Derrida, 1994: 99)*

## New Materialisms

My early writing led to the realization that my own positioning was falling in line with a new materialist stance and as time progressed through the thesis, there was a need for this position to be acknowledged. It was never my intention to write a new materialist-inspired thesis, as my work has been driven by attempts to explore and write creatively and differently, mirroring my developing understanding of 'atmospheres' as highly complex. Nevertheless the thesis moved in this direction and as I engaged with research within the broad umbrella of new materialism I could see the obvious links with what I am attempting. It is difficult to place new materialism in a firm way, since materially-informed work has functioned under many names, including 'new empiricism', 'posthuman studies', 'material feminism', 'new materialism', 'process philosophy', 'actor network theory' and the 'ontological turn' (Maclure, 2015). Key theorists in this field include many authors that I have read as part of the study, such as Gilles Deleuze (2004), Karen Barad (2007), Brian Massumi (2002), Rosi Braidotti (2013), Bruno Latour (2004) and Jane Bennett (2010), as well as significant others such as Donna Haraway (2008).

Each theorist has a different paradigmatic position, and would perhaps resist being lumped together as part of one larger umbrella. Their connections lie within a shared interest in the significance of matter in social and cultural practices. In diverse ways they resist the notion of nature as merely the backdrop for human activity and

instead matter  
and discourse are  
implicated  
together in  
complex and  
shifting  
assemblages. In  
Maclure's (2015)  
words 'new  
materialists do not  
reify or fetishize  
matter', and avoid

Cut out

what Massumi (2002) terms 'naïve realism'. New materialism differs from earlier incarnations of materialism which was reductionist in nature and focused on macro-structures and superstructures (Fox and Alldred, 2015). Furthermore, the binary structures, such as nature/culture, discourse/matter, human/nonhuman, representation/reality have no significant place in a new materialist ontology. Exponents of new materialism therefore avoid critiques of ontological dualism, preferring instead a creative affirmation of a new ontology which Coole and Frost (2010: 8) propose is more consistent with 'the productive, inventive capacities they ascribe to materiality itself'.

Matter has a vitalism, a lively immanence and a generative set of powers or agentic capacities. A monological account of ontology considers the distinctions between subject-object, organic-inorganic as unimportant. Materiality becomes more than even this 'matter', becoming 'an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive and unpredictable' (Coole and Frost, 2010: 9). In attempting to research something as ethereal as atmosphere, and particularly those potentially situated within a school environment, it was necessary for me to turn to materiality. This research area appears to demand some detailed examination of matter at multiple levels. As the various forms of data that I have discursively engaged with indicate, the non-human matter is a significant part of what makes a school. Atmospheres then matter as much as anything else. The dynamic and productivity of the forming and re-forming atmosphere seems an ideal subject to research using a new materialist ontology.

Cut out

However, it is worth exploring ways that new materialism can be criticized.

Wetherell (2012) offers a sound criticism that is useful to the way I am approaching both this research project and my conception of atmospheres. She argues that conceptions of affect sever the links between 'affect' and 'meaning-making'. Instead she argues that 'what is needed is an eclectic approach that investigates how the organization of discursive formations or 'big discourse' intertwines with the patterning of everyday, dynamic and immediate discursive practice' (Wetherell, 2012: 55). Her attack is scathing at times as she, for example, dismisses Stewart's work as pleasurable to read, yet failing to deliver. Key authors for me such as Deleuze, Massumi and Thrift are next in the frame as she positions affect far away from something multiple and virtual. Drawing upon disciplines such as psychology and neuroscience, she suggests that such theorists only offer a fraction of what affect may be and as soon as culture, discourse, cognition and consciousness emerge a 'storyline' begins to develop. She suggests that therefore affect becomes actual and determinable. Her position is made clear in this quotation:

'the picture that psychology and neuroscience typically now paints of affect is of a highly dynamic, interacting composite or assemblage of autonomic bodily responses (eg. sweating, trembling, blushing), other body actions (approaching or avoiding), subjective feelings and other qualia, cognitive processing (eg. perception, attention, memory, decision-making), the firing and projection of neural circuits (eg. from the thalamus to the cortex and the amygdala), verbal reports (from

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exclamations to narratives) and communicative signals such as facial expressions. An emotional episode, such as a burst of affect like rage or grief, integrates and brings together all of these things in the same general moment.' (Wetherell, 2012: 62)

Anderson's (2006) approach towards affect appeases Wetherell slightly as she believes that he attempts to capture affect in a more holistic way, stitching back what Massumi has divided. Anderson sees three different modalities of affect, with one being the Massumi sense of something that is pre-personal, autonomous and unknowable. Next is the sense of a 'feeling,' which may be linked to autonomic bodily responses recognizing that some affecting has taken place, such as an embarrassed blush. Finally, Anderson proposes 'emotion' occurs which is organized into feelings and then narratives. Whilst these stages read as linear Anderson suggests these 'three modalities slide into and out of one another to disrupt the neat analytic distinction. Diverse feed-forward and feedback loops take place...' (Anderson, 2006: 37)

I recognize the value in what Anderson says here, but it is for very specific reasons that I have chosen to view the affective nature of atmosphere in a Deleuzian way, moving towards Massumi's sense of becoming and emergence. Atmosphere's moment of affect seems to occur where it breathes to life before immediately expiring or changing. The other modalities are then extraneous for the purposes of this project since it is the emergent atmosphere that is of interest. The other modalities are about the ongoing aftermath...what the atmosphere then leaves behind. Emotions and feelings are naturally important in a school environment but this project intentionally

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focuses at the unknowable and emergent moments. I don't believe I am 'severing the assemblage', but rather I have made a decision to become focused on particular characteristics. I suggest that there is a competing narrative between Anderson, Wetherell and others that is occurring at different scales, leading towards a seemingly circular argument.

I understand that they are both attempting to capture the complexity and dynamism within this system, but this then implies that the complexity can be known and understood. Anderson's work is more congruent with this project as he is able to conceptualise thinking with atmosphere in complex and deeper ways. Conversely, Wetherell believes that atmosphere can only be understood through exploring more scientific approaches. Later when exploring the work of Barad I hope to show that more scientific approaches do not have to be incongruous with the complexity and indeed can add in complexity.

My approach suggests that this atmosphere is inherently elusive and that bodies will experience an affective atmosphere in such diverse ways. In effect then I feel that by studying atmospheres in schools, I am therefore 'Reaching a Plateau', linking in the narrative story. Rather like the wildlife photographer waiting to capture the shot of the illusive endangered creature, I am waiting in silence to catch a glimpse. Except I maybe don't know what creature I am waiting to see or where to look and instead it feels like groping around in a darkened room. I think that the stability

Wetherell

describes is often  
fleeting, as affect  
moves in and out  
of determinability.

And for the

purposes of this  
study atmosphere  
lends itself to a  
research  
approach which is  
dynamic, slippery  
and often lost. It is

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always just on the edge and in its movement I attempt to momentarily move alongside and with it, in order to think with an atmosphere. It also cannot be ignored that Wetherell's approach, will always privilege consciousness and ultimately humans. She justifies this by exploring notions of psychology and neuroscience, but fails to acknowledge that utilizing such concepts will always consign the Other – the nonhuman – to a lesser status, merely because of the use of these paradigmatic positions.

Turning my attention towards the nonhuman has been a hugely useful part of my research process. For example, just because I cannot understand how the school chair or the signs on the wall affect an atmosphere, doesn't mean these are irrelevant or not part of the atmospheric assemblage. So rather than see Wetherell's criticism of non-representation and post-human notions of atmosphere as legitimate, I consider that she has limited her viewpoint. Her argument doesn't stand up for me. Furthermore, if my study was based on Wetherell's thinking in relation to psychology it would become limited to a study of the emotions and the impact of a perceived atmosphere on people – this would be a very different beast and the limitations of such an approach would give a very different insight into atmosphere. It would clearly slip into a more positivistic and narrowed view and would fall into what I believe is the banal trap of traditional educational research, relying heavily on psychological models and theories. I'd rather 'blow up the shed' than analyze its contents in situ...

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**Cold Dark Matter - Exploded View by Cornelia Parker. Whitworth Art Gallery**

Cut out

## A tense atmosphere

A tension that I have experienced within the thesis and its commitment to all matter, has been this tendency to always return my thinking to the human perspective. This seems to creep into my writing as phrases such as ‘embodied’ and ‘corporeally meaningful’ move to more literal meanings of being ‘about the body’. The risky business comes as I slip into ideas of an affective atmosphere only having affect on the human body, and without meaning to, I dismiss the rest of the assemblage. This is further compounded by my own set of beliefs and values that I espouse within my writing about morality and the initial drivers for wanting to research how school might affect children in much more complex ways than is normally considered. Here my thinking unintentionally leaves new materialism to seek social justice for the individual and pushes against notions surrounding the political and power. This appears to relate to what Coole and Frost (2010) describe in the paradox of thinking about matter. They use the phrase ‘void’ to think about the way that material approaches try and open up a space. These spaces are fascinating for me and seem to allow the approaches that I am taking in the thesis to be acceptable. However, there is a risk that the void naturally gets filled with immaterials things: ‘language, consciousness, subjectivity, agency, mind, soul...imagination, emotions, values, meaning and so on’ (Coole and Frost, 2010: 2). Whilst some of these immaterial things may be productive for me, others seem to jar with the concepts of new materialism and hence why I think it is important to continue to revisit what it means to research using this lens. At this time it means closing this void.

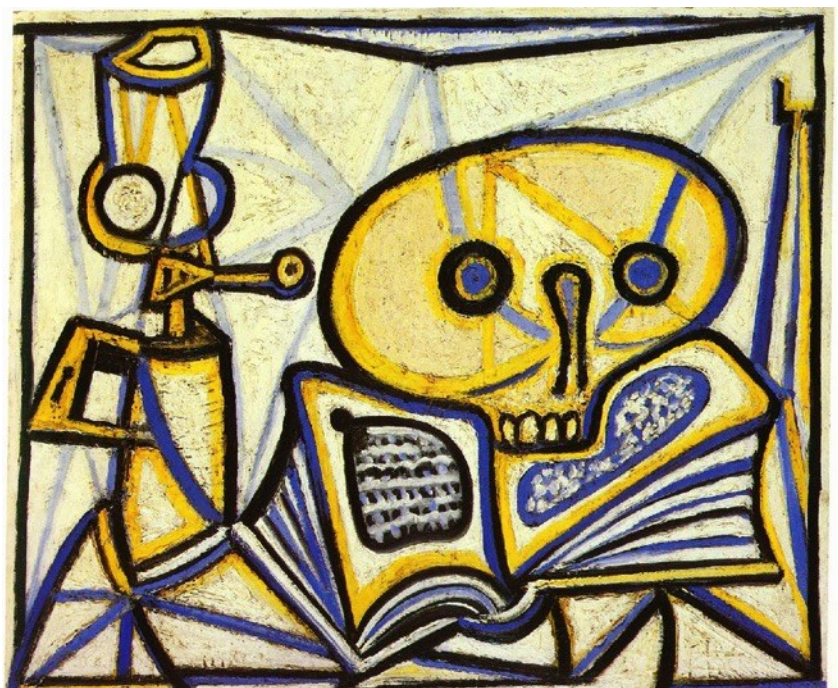
As approaches  
here exist at  
multiple levels, the  
contextual political  
connotations  
should be  
explored,  
particularly as the  
study is located in  
schools which are

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entrenched in politics and the political. A congruency with new materialism is that politics can be viewed as a continually negotiated process of engaging with power. 'For new materialists, no adequate political theory can ignore the importance of bodies in situating empirical actors within a material environment of nature, other bodies, and the socioeconomic structures that dictate where and how they find sustenance, satisfy their desires or obtain the resources necessary for participating in political life' (Coole and Frost, 2010:19). This links back to my earlier worry about privileging the human, in announcing that the social world is constructed before (and while) they are encountered by rational actors. Linking back to atmospheres within a school setting, I can wonder whether the atmosphere is located within the empty school. This is analogous with the adage 'does the tree falling in the deserted woods make a sound?' Framing the atmosphere politically and allowing the non-human their agentic capacities suggests that maybe the atmosphere is pervasive. It does therefore exist in that empty building.

Remaining with power momentarily, it is useful to consider how Foucault interrogated ways that the body is 'broken down by the rhythms of work, rest and holidays...poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws' (Foucault, 1980: 153). Here, I am reminded of the notion of 'docile bodies' whereby the body is regulated to become part of the disciplinary machine – an individual subjected, used and ultimately transformed to become a disciplined body. This idea can be extended beyond the human to consider 'docile matter' to include the ways that the nonhuman become part of this machine. Connoted here is an idea that some matter has more power than

**Picasso (1946)  
Book, Skull and  
Oil Lamp**





others and therefore matters more. Relating this to atmosphere it is difficult to conceive how all matter would not be part of the assemblage. However, again I think it is a very human trait to dismiss the inanimate as less important, and as meaningless or powerless. It was this commitment to the the nonhuman that helped me to make decisions around the collection of data within the research. Indeed it can be suggested that placing the co-researching children behind the camera meant that they could also *notice* the nonhuman, and this was indeed shown by most of the film data which surprisingly had less footage of other children than I imagined.

Finally in this section, I want to turn to the work of Maclure (2015) in thinking about appropriate ways that a new materialist approach may be critiqued further. This mirrors some of my uncertainties as I began to articulate my project to others, and is an important voice to develop in defending the ways that I have viewed the research. Maclure works to breakdown the various notions of what constitutes 'critique' examining the obvious tension in taking a materialist stance and then falling back into traditional ways of critiquing. 'For many of the new materialisms...one of the main problems with critique is that it arrests things – stitches them up, pins them down or closes them down, in the rage to expose error and the rush to pronounce judgement' (Maclure, 2015: 101). Instead something more immanent, experimental and productive is called for.

The notion of a *critique* within qualitative research can be contested since it originates from a discourse of revealing errors and from unmasking something that may not be the truth. As Maclure (2015: 97) states 'it presupposes a corrective technique authorized by the bifurcation of nature.' As I have already noted, within new materialism the asymmetrically-valued categories are rejected in order to seek a research approach attempting to find more of 'what is taking place'. Therefore the stance for the new materialist is that of the middle ground, where there is a singularity rather than the separation of subjects and 'their' objects. This relates to Barad's 'intra-action' (2007: 33), where humans lack the dominance surrounding agency and consciousness, and within these *intra*-actions matter is afforded intensity and is agentic. This leaves the very concept of critique as stalling and not quite satisfactory within this context.

Latour offers a position on conventional critical theory by proposing that it 'transforms the whole rest of the world into naïve believers, into fetishists, into hapless victims of domination' (Latour, 2004: 243). This point is two-fold in that there is an accusation of fetishism in thinking that non-human matter might have significance, whilst simultaneously arguing that to be objective they can be certain around their own 'objects', such as gender, race, class, language etc... To me this begins to sink into older arguments around master narratives of 'good research' which in relation to Latour becomes about 'matters of fact' being valued more highly than 'matters of concern'. This is a subtle but significant difference in moving away from a way of knowing the world to an attitude of concern of the world. As such it becomes less about what makes something 'good' but instead turns the gaze in a different direction – looking at the issues from a multitude of angles. Unlike poststructuralist and neo-marxist challenges to critique, with new materialism the debate rests not only with epistemology but also with this emerging ontology. The matters of concern are of primary importance when this complex, dynamic, material assemblage is envisaged.

For Deleuze, critique is further dismembered through considering the strange ways that representation operates. In particular the privileging of language which moves up and away from matter, as though it lacks its own materiality. Deleuze argues against this and describes the hierarchical logic of representation as static. Like Maclure's notion of critique 'arresting' things, representation becomes the enemy of change, difference, movement and the new. Deleuze uses the phrase 'pure difference' suggesting that it gets crucified by representation as it is 'trussed up and pinned in place by 'quadripartite fetters, under which only that which is identical, similar, analogous, or opposed can be considered different' (Deleuze, 1994: 174).

There is therefore a strong developing voice within the new materialisms that argues that traditional notions of 'critique' are not fit for purpose. As Massumi puts it, 'it is not that critique is wrong...rather it is a question of dosage. It is simply that when you are busy critiquing you are less busy augmenting' (Massumi, 2002: 12). The research foci of many new materialisms demand something more. It seeks something productive and intense, a *becoming*-research project of vitalities and vibrance, which opens up possibilities rather than closing them down. I believe that atmosphere as a research field demands such an approach to research.



This is not an arrogant approach or a way for researchers to reject critique per se. Instead it is a turn towards something more apt and emergent that is therefore able to consider discursive and creative approaches. What is demanded is an approach to critique that is what Massumi calls 'event-ful', with Maclure suggesting that there must be 'immanence'. She states:

'critique must be...caught up with the movements and processes in which it is entangled. It must be transversal: able to follow, or sense, the multifarious connections and intensities that coalesce in events, rather than sniping from its particular dugout at other disciplines and paradigms. It must be oriented towards eventualities that cannot be foreseen, and where the usual privileges of human agency, and the linearity of cause and effect are not at play'. (Maclure, 2015: 105)

For my research project this involves looking at it from the middle, rather than the outside. It is about acknowledging the attempts to think creatively with children and adults about the material world and the way that a perceived atmosphere may dynamically exist. Through the resistance of attempting to represent 'an atmosphere' instead there is an attempt to creatively play with it. I have purposefully used the word 'adventure' within the title of the thesis as this seems to reflect the mood of the whole piece. Maclure (2015) suggests that the critique should be considered an adventure where care and recklessness may exist simultaneously. Critique within new materialism might aim to attune the flows of affect and discourse in an eventful productive way, leading to new insights. It is tentative and exploratory but always resists the masterful ideas of privileging human agency. It should excite rather than close down.

# Reaching a Plateau

## Preface

'Reaching a Plateau' is a narrative story. It was written after the data was gathered and explores multiple themes. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of plateaus, the story appears at various resting points along the way through this thesis. The coloured font is a deliberate attempt to signpost the narrative lines of flight to the reader.

*No man is an island,  
Entire of itself,  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe is the less.  
As well as if a promontory were.  
As well as if a manor of thy friend's  
Or of thine own were:  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
Because I am involved in mankind,  
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;  
It tolls for thee.*

*John Donne*

*'The Kingdom of God is within man — not one man nor a group of men, but in all men! In you! You, the people have the power — the power to create machines. The power to create happiness! You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure.'*

*Charlie Chaplin*

## **Chapter 1 The Study and Craft of the Totemicals.**

Standing proud. Smooth and weathered, the totemicals looked out from the shoreline. The wood was cracked and their colours faded, but each still held its magical and mysterious properties. Here were only a handful of totemicals. A small cluster with the tallest reaching at least two stories in height. On closer inspection, the teeth marks that had lovingly created the poles were visible although time had weathered and reduced these. Without the presence of the Coosur, the totemicals would feel innocent. Art pieces installed across the island, and yet they were much more than that.

Mohriza, the human, understood a little of the culture of the island and knew that the totemicals were a crucial and central part of the way that the island worked. His many eyeglasses and scopes meant that over the last few years he had been observing. His quest was to fully understand the unique ways and means of the islanders. He rarely left his floating blimp anchored just off the coast nor indeed did he leave his scopes. Much of the space of the airship was filled with his field notes and books. These lacked any particular order and some of the multi-coloured spines had aged and cracked. Yet Mohriza knew exactly how to return to any of the data that he had collected over the last 15 years. His catalogue system existed in his own mind.

Several of these books were on the subject of the totemicals, the wooden poles that had been carved by the Coosur. Each was unique, but usually depicted the animals and gods that were part of island life. Their three-dimensional reliefs comprised varied birds, animals and symbols, leaping from the background as part of the gaiety, as though they were enjoying some strange festival. Over many years, and before their coming of age, the Coosur would spend hours each day in their small community groups carving away at the wood. This might sound like a chore, but it had become clear to Mohriza how much joy and fun was gained by the Coosur. This was written on their faces and in their body language, in the way they stood back to look at their work and the way that they held their body and gaze. The carving was ingrained as a social act with time to laugh and bond. The Coosurs had a shared sense of purpose as they progressed towards the finished totemical. And the associated graduation ceremony and ‘hauling of the totemical’ into their final resting place, marked the end of the farming phase and freedom for the animals to move to the south side of the island with the elder Coosur.

Freedom was a new word on the island that had grown in use since the 'Totemical Act' that had been introduced five years ago. This had intrigued Mohriza, the foremost and prominent researcher and expert on the island, as very slowly through time he had noticed the changes. They were so subtle and seemingly benign that the Teveners adopted and shifted practice without question. Historically, the Coosurs had always been free to roam, so it was ironic that confinement was creating a desire to be free. In some cases, the growth of power and control was so severe that the Coosur were physically tethered to their totemical. A strong metal rope held them to the totemicals with its length varying according to the ages of the Coosur. The carving had never been an issue for River until this point. Although he didn't understand the quest for beauty, he loved to carve and sharpen his teeth whilst making the poles. In fact, his favourite past time had been making the other Coosur in his community laugh, something he had become adept at over time. But this had now changed. Freedom was now the main pre-occupation for River.



**Still taken from research film**

Mohriza had noticed River too. In most cases the llama-like Coosur looked similar. Their fur had distinct colours and tones but they generally appeared similar. They walked on all fours, in a dainty way, matching their small hooves. Their elongated necks and small round tails made them look like some kind of chimera, a pick and mix of other creatures that was put together to create the Coosur. The Teveners had decreed that the Coosur's manes must all be the same length and this gave them a conformity and sameness. This was some kind of expression of the control, acting like a uniform. River met the strict rules around this but there was something else about him. The way he moved gave a different kind of pace and

jaunt to his gait, like you could hear the laughter in the way he moved. There was also something slightly different about River's mane. The length met the necessary regulations but somehow it never lay quite flat and instead would stick up and resist being tamed. River had a recurring thought running through his mind, that 'they might have a uniform but they can't make me be the same as everybody else'. When he was younger River hated his hair and the way it made him stand out from the crowd. However, in recent times it was something that he was proud of and in fact he could often be seen flicking his mane up in an attempt to highlight its difference. An exaggeration-act to mark his individuality. His rebellion had always started off small, before growing into something much bigger.

## Singular Atmospheres

### 'Seeing the back of your head'

**Familiarity and routine. I'd not realized how much that really governed our lives...and in a way that encourages us to be less questioning. Engineering works on the line force me to take an alternative train to get into Manchester. It is a disorientating experience as I learn the new numbers of platforms and have to actively seek out information rather than it being within and known. What really strikes me is the fact that the people are different. I didn't have a regular train but over the last 12 months had grown used to the faces of the regular commuters. During periods of change...changing platforms, delays...it was comforting to see these faces, telling me that I am 'in it too' and I am on the correct train. I'd started to inadvertently read the people as much as the electronic boards.**

**So on the new train, the strangers are strange. The landscape outside the window is different. This train allows me to get off at Oxford road station rather than Piccadilly. It follows the route that I normally walk and again I see a different side of the familiar journey. The backs of the buildings, the hidden alleys, the flat roofs... the same things but just from a different angle. It feels like seeing the back of your head...that youthful attempt to angle several mirrors to see an unfamiliar part of your body. It is with you every day and yet you don't see it. It reminds me of how little we actually see. It alerts me to the need to look at things from all different angles, to examine and re-examine. The thesis swims in my head and cannot be separated from these daily lived experiences.**

**Research Journal Entry 28/7/2015**

Constantly returning to thoughts of atmosphere is an exercise in seeking further positions and thoughts on the issue. Here I build upon the chapter 'Atmospheres: Becoming'. Ingold's (2013a) work on atmosphere has an important place here. One reason for this is his attempts to explore the gaps between the two meanings of the word; the affective one and the meteorological one, with the suggestions that there is a complimentary existence between the two.

Ingold expresses his frustrations that the aesthetic notion of atmosphere makes no reference to the weather. Conversely, the meteorological connotation is void of any mention of mood or affect, as though each system exists in a vacuum. Both sides appear to claim their particular sense of 'atmosphere' as primary and that the other is merely metaphorical. Ingold (2013a: 81) considers atmospheres as bodily with a flow between the states, 'the indoor atmosphere is created by a coming together of people and things, but only because of their common immersion in the medium. In short, to transcend the opposition between the meteorological and the affective we need to refill the atmosphere with the material stuff of air. And that is at once

to acknowledge that the world we inhabit far from having crystallized into fixed and final forms, is a world of becoming, of fluxes and flows or, in short, a weather-world.'

Ingold (2013a) further, draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty (1964) to explore the affect of objects in certain environments. This is an interesting move and is another signpost for my projection towards new materialisms. A historic conversation with Andre Marchand about the forest is quoted, stating that it felt like it was not he who was looking at the trees, but rather the other way around. 'On some days I felt that it was the trees that were looking at me' (Charbonnier, 1959: cited by Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 31). This is of course metaphorical, as it isn't suggesting that the trees have eyes, rather that the trees have an affect. Their presence evokes emotions and feelings in the painter that act as though they 'speak'. This exploration of objects, not as sentient, but having sentience is quite profound. For me, this opens pathways for this research so that I am able to explore notions of atmospheres in schools in more open ways. Tilley (2004) asserts that the objects are as much a part of the phenomenal world as human beings, with Merleau-Ponty (1968) suggesting that both object and subjects are 'of the same flesh'. 'Neither tree, stone nor glacier are in themselves sentient. But *immersed in sentience*, they can, as it were, double back so as to see, touch and hear themselves' (Ingold, 2013a: 85). In this 'coiling over', perceivers become one with what they perceive (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 140).

This exploration leads me to some readings that have been influential around object-subject specific arguments. Work with atmosphere in different contexts and Ingold's changing direction had already implicated the way that objects within a place would have an impact on the atmosphere. The vital materiality of objects within a school environment is rich and ripe for exploration as part of this research project. However, as already stated, the subject-object debate is not one that I wished to pursue as this seems somewhat redundant in my non-representational approach to writing – the pursuit of this would become banal and an empty vessel for me in the (re)search around atmosphere. A dead end. Instead the 'ordinary affects' of Stewart (2007), the 'vibrant matter' from Bennett (2010) and the 'vitalist materialism' from Braidotti (2013) have pointed me in another direction. One that bolsters the discussions on atmosphere and is an exciting place of discovery.



## Affects

‘Sometimes when you hear someone scream it goes in one ear and out the other. Sometimes it passes right into the middle of your brain and gets stuck there’ (Stewart, 2003: 441).

Stewart (2007) uses stories and her experiences to show how these create ‘ordinary affects’, seen as a way to experiment rather than form judgments. It is an exploration, ‘a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or a simple life’ (Stewart, 2007). It acknowledges her turn away from labels such as capitalism, neoliberalism and globalization, due to her opinion that these have failed to adequately describe the situation that we find ourselves in. Whilst Stewart doesn’t describe atmospheres as such, my reading of her work shows how closely they could be related. Ordinary affects are surging capacities able to affect and be affected – it has energy and is alive, but can also have negative affects.

‘[They] happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *something*’ (Stewart, 2007: 1-2)

The vitality of this writing and the way that these affective aspects of things is critically important to me as I attempt to think with atmosphere. These ordinary affects allow a new way of thinking for me in terms of how a school atmosphere may be so dynamic and be something which expresses itself through intensities.

Linking with the writing of Bennett (2010) and her ‘thing-power debris’, she writes eloquently about a set of objects found and noticed; the dead rat, the plastic bottle top, the large black plastic work glove, the smooth stick of wood and the dense mat of pollen. Bennett is able to describe multiple layers of this observation. At first the objects are silent, meant to be ignored, but in the next moment they shimmer and warrant further attention. What is it that has brought these particular objects together? The dead rat has an affective power or repulsion, but the affect of the

tableau is much deeper. Gould (2002) would label this the 'excruciating complexity and intractability' of nonhuman bodies.

Within this turn towards something else, we have on the one hand the productive impact described in a vibrant way, speaking of intensities and complexity and on the other, we start to imagine a much more intriguing interplay with the human and nonhuman. Like atmosphere, Bennett goes on to talk about a certain set of circumstance and something within that noticing moment that was important. These include the weather and the way that the sun caught the objects, the presence of the rat that initially caught her attention and then drew her gaze towards the other things, and Bennett herself – all producing something. These can be perceived as an assemblage. Bennett describes that '...they were all there just as they were, and so I caught a glimpse of an energetic vitality inside each of these things, things that I generally conceived as inert. In this assemblage, objects appeared as things, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (humans) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics' (Bennett, 2010: 5).

This returns us to the discussion earlier around producing an atmosphere which I suggest is not possible because of its heterogeneity. We can place objects into a 'scene' but we cannot produce their vitality, we cannot know how these may interact with the other objects in the scene. Similarly, we cannot understand how the multiple ways of interpreting the objects can have an affective impact on people. This is because affects aren't something that we can readily control. It is also important here to consider the ways that affect and emotions may relate because these terms aren't interchangeable. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) conceptualise affect as prepersonal whereas emotion is experienced at a social level. Emotions are therefore linked more to feeling and are something that one would label. Affect on the other hand is a non-conscious experience of intensity. This links us back to the modalities used by Anderson (2006).

In cinema and the theatre it is clearer how devices are used to evoke emotional responses in the audience. The sad ending and the clever choice of music may bring a tear to the eye, but something about being at the cinema or theatre indicates a willingness to be influenced by the film. There are environments that are perhaps pre-coded for us to consider and notice an 'atmosphere', amongst

other things. Think of a meal at a restaurant as an example that is familiar to many of us, and a typical place where the atmosphere may be reified through the process of articulating it. There is a complex set of interplays taking place...including levels of staff attentiveness, lighting, music (genre and volume), how busy it is (not too busy/not too quiet?) the individual's mood, the relationships with the people you are attending the place with, whether you want to be there or not, etc... Can a restaurant really influence these complex things? Not really, to me the atmosphere is too complex and intangible, existing in a state of flux. The restaurant may create the conditions that they desire with design features like lighting, décor and using their staff, but this does not create an atmosphere by itself. It can only ever be a partial factor.

Anderson writes extensively about notions of affect, recognizing that atmospheres are affective and emotive. He suggests that due to the ambiguity of atmosphere, affect and emotions, we must offer concepts that are equally ambiguous. He states that:

‘... it is the very ambiguity of affective atmospheres – between presence and absence between subject and object/subject and between the definite and indefinite – that enables us to reflect on affective experience as occurring beyond, around, and alongside the formation of subjectivity’ (Anderson, 2009: 77).

And in supporting my search for atmospheres in schools, Anderson states that perhaps there is nothing that doesn't have an atmosphere or could be described as atmospheric. For me, it is increasingly clear that should an atmosphere exist, all spaces would need to be atmospherized – something that I will return to later. Anderson also draws on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Thrift (2008) and Stewart (2007) to see atmosphere in a constant state of becoming and emergence. ‘Atmospheres are always in the process of emerging and transforming. They are always being taken up and reworked in lived experience – becoming part of feelings and emotions that may themselves become elements within other atmospheres’ (Anderson, 2009: 79). Therefore the links with affect and feelings/emotions are there, with the affect being relational in being able to produce the feelings/emotions. It is clear how affect fits within a new materialism approach which is where my work has moved.

A strength that I see in Anderson's view on atmosphere is his suggestion that it is worthy of study because of the tensions and opposites that it implies – 'presence and absence, materiality and ideality, definite and indefinite, singularity and generality' (Anderson, 2009: 80). Placing research on atmospheres into educational research certainly creates a tension, since such research is often more pragmatic. By this I mean that I mean there is a propensity for educational research to take less creative methods, and sit with approaches that seek to be evaluative (eg. action research, case studies). Instead, through the processes of carrying out this project I am more interested in the tensions than in any pragmatism. In many ways this is emancipatory for me and I embrace the idea that it is impossible to describe what a school experience might be like. In this sense there is merit in a move away from certainty within educational research, and importantly for schools to cease the façade of being able to describe their school ethos and atmosphere as something tangible, fixed and real. It is the virtuality and intensity of an atmosphere that is of interest, rather than its identity. It is emancipatory for me as it allows my thinking to develop and evolve in other ways that will impact upon my professional identity and experiences. This thesis will constantly (re)visit the tension through its aims of being a discursive text – one that seeks to be creative in opening up thinking and debate around school atmospheres.

Thrift (2008) writes about affect and it links with my thoughts described above about experiences of atmosphere. He makes the point that there is no easy definition of affect since it can mean many things. There is a link with words such as emotion and feeling and a constant repertoire of others; 'hatred, shame, envy, fear, disgust, anger, embarrassment, sorrow, grief, anguish, love, happiness, joy, hope, wonder...' (Thrift, 2008: 175).

My experiences of attempting to teach 'emotions' to primary aged pupils tells me that even taking one of Thrift's feeling words is fraught with problems and as soon as you attempt to read meaning into them, you understand that it isn't as solid as you think. What these words also serve to do is privilege individual reactions to things rather than taking affect at a different scale. That is to restate the point that, according to Deleuze, affect does not operate at a personal scale and is

prepersonal in nature. Affect, and its links with atmosphere, warrants a sensitive approach which sees it in motion and in a constant flow.

What Thrift (2008) does very well is to untangle the web of affect into four areas; embodied knowledge, biological differentiation, Spinoza-Deleuze emergence and neo-Darwinism. This is useful to my argument as it helps me to recognize that my work is running along two parallel lines – one that is interested in the embodied aspects of atmosphere, running alongside the other that draws upon Spinoza and Deleuzian notions of affect as a natural force of emergence.

#### **Playing out**

**Outside we have loads of space and we are not all crammed together when we go out. We have a big field too. It is good that we are all together because the older children can look after the younger ones. The playground is concrete and hard. If you fall it can really hurt you. At home I'd go to a park. We wouldn't play on a car park. But if there was grass everywhere it would get muddy. Football is important to me...we get a chance to play at lunchtimes on Wednesdays. We were playing football today and this girl kept taking the ball from us thinking she is the boss. It was a bit boring today.**

**Student voices – interview da**

Seeing affect as an embodied set of practices that produces something has its roots in a phenomenological approach with its main purpose being developing descriptions of how the affect manifests itself in everyday life. Thrift (2004a: 60) describes this as '[affect] understood as the richly expressive/aesthetic feeling-cum-behaviour of continual becoming that is chiefly provided by bodily state and processes (and which is understood as constitutive of affect)'. Routed within this paradigm are the issues of decontextualization and the turn from representation.

In terms of representation, I believe affect is slippery and largely non-representational, and the demand to capture an atmosphere is therefore left redundant. As such I believe that research which draws on techniques of non-representation is better suited to the topic of affect. Katz (2000) describes how talk is never quite able to capture the affective or emotions, which links with the decisions made about the way that I might research atmosphere. If talk is inadequate then the written form must also come with limitations. Within this project I seek alternative forms of language than just written text as I attempt to

think in more multi-dimensional ways; ways that may lend themselves to being intense and atmospheric. One methodological position of this thesis is therefore to work with concepts of non-representation, a theme that I will later return to.

Stewart's (2007) approach has an embodied sense, as she describes the materialistic stance with power coming from textures and densities. A holistic approach is taken where bodies, dreams, objects and the social world all give and take meaning. 'Their significance lies in the intensities they build and what thoughts and feelings they make possible' (Stewart, 2007: 21). There is an energy to the ordinary affects, with surges and jumps rather than a homogenous state. Stewart uses the image of a still life, a descriptive scene that captures a moment in time. However, this is not an empty static scene, but a scene filled with 'vibratory motion, or resonance. A quivering in the stability of a category or a trajectory, it gives the ordinary the charge of an unfolding.' (Stewart, 2007: 19). Whilst neither author is writing about atmosphere, the resonances are too obvious to be ignored. As I continue to conceive of atmospheres and their vibrancy, more possibilities open into how they may be flicker into being.

### **Salmon Drawing (Ingold, 2011)**



Ingold draws this 'Salmon drawing' line to demonstrate the fish jumping upstream that he had witnessed in a Scottish river. Rather than draw the fish, he is trying to show something much more vibrant through capturing its

movement. In his own words he suggests, 'to be sure, if you merely look *at* it, there is nothing much to see. You have rather to look *with* it: to re-live the movement that, in turn, described the vault of my own observation as I watched the salmon leap the falls. In this line, movement, observation and description become one. And this unity, I contend, is nothing less than that of life itself' (Ingold, 2011; 1). It is a resistance against ethnographic writing and anthropological research that ends up focusing on the stable, static and closed. Through drawing a simple line there is a powerful reminder to invigorate the

objects of research, reminding us of its growth, movement and vitality. It reminds me about the need to see things in different ways – to study one’s hand with a focus on the spaces between the fingers rather than the fingers themselves. To see the movements of the atmosphere rather than staring directly at the hidden thing is critically important to this research.

Stewart does begin to write in terms of ‘atmospheric attunements’ where she grapples with the idea that one might become tuned into ‘something’, be that ‘felt, or half-felt, or barely felt...’ (Stewart, 2011: 449). There are times where these snap into place and others when they may be lost. In resisting notions of representation she suggests that ‘things matter not because of how they are represented but because they have qualities, rhythms, forces, relations and movements’ (2011: 445). Here Stewart again, shows that through writing in interesting and creative ways there is a sense of co-producing the ‘atmospherics’ to generate writing that is evocative, an emerging approach of new materialism becoming evident. Use of language, narrative and metaphor allow the reader to engage in different ways, which is something I continually strive towards in this thesis. Language will be another theme that I return to as I draw on thinking with Deleuze in relation to the thesis.

In returning to Bennett’s (2010) work she seeks to show how nonhuman bodies may be seen as ‘vibrant matter and lively things’. She suggests that ‘by ‘vitality,’ I mean the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own’ (Bennett, 2010: viii). There is an opportunity to think about affect in a wider sense, not just the subjective sense. An ontology that is flat with regard to the subject-object dichotomy encourages us to rethink notions of affect. We can draw on Latour’s notion of the actant, as a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it has efficacy, can ‘do’ things, and has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, or alter the course of events (Latour, 2004). Whilst some objects may have little ability to ‘do things’ there is something interesting and challenging about considering a world where there is more distributive agency. When related back to this research project, these ideas encourage me to look in a much wider way. An inquiry around atmospheres seems to privilege the human and their responses to the atmosphere, but such a focus is extremely limited.



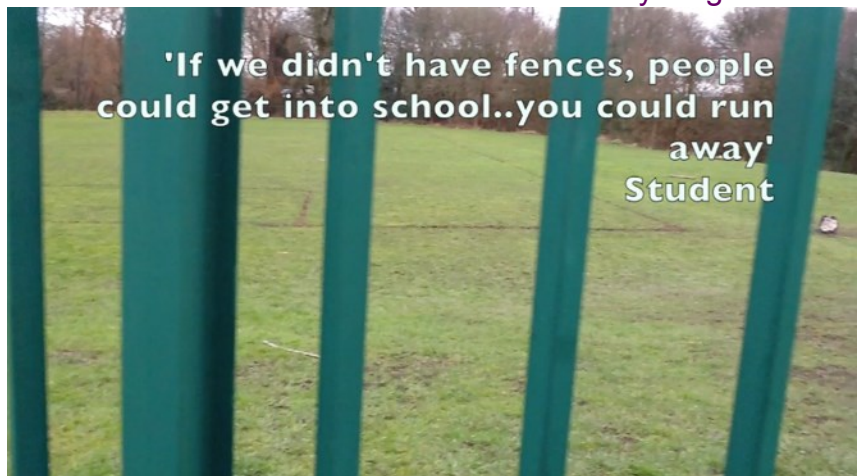
In bypassing the hierarchy of subjects over objects, Bennett powerfully reminds us that the human itself is an assemblage of microbes and other substances. She evokes the bacteria colonies that exist in the human elbow, quoting Wade (2008) to state '[My elbow is]...a special ecosystem, a bountiful home to no fewer than six tribes of bacteria...They are helping to moisturize the skin by processing the raw fats it produces...The bacteria in the human microbiome collectively possess at least 100 times as many genes as the mere 20,000 or so in the human genome. As Bennett (2010: 112) suggests 'the *its* outnumber the *mes*' (original emphasis). Ingold (2013b) also agrees with this point recognizing the way that the human genome is 'fundamentally entangled with the microbiomes of other organisms' (2013b: 29) suggesting that the human is a composite, an emerging 'supra-organism.' Here this strong visual image serves to remind me how important it is to challenge my own thinking in relation to the human subject and how easy it is to slip back to old notions and privileging. Here even the subject is entangled with nonhuman matter, which leads to a sense of rendering the subject-object dichotomy as redundant.

# Reaching a Plateau

## Chapter 2: The Beautiful Teveners

Glacial understood difference, but like most other Teveners the most important thing in the world for her was 'beauty'. Beauty and perfection was their *raison d'être* and Glacial felt like the personification of this. This quest pervaded all aspects of their life, and was what the islanders termed 'Sundara'. It transcended everything. The way to demonstrate this beauty was complex as it was both an internal and external quality. The main way to evidence this special journey, was to produce the most beautiful totemical on the island. Displaying this would send a message to all inhabitants that their quest was in an advanced state. This hadn't been something that happened easily and the beauty-mission was a daily obsession. The Totemical Act had supported this and now Glacial could push her Coosurs even further. She had to compete with the others and the tether was an unfortunate consequence of brilliance. 'Sundara' came before everything else. 'It's just the way things are now', Glacial would say to others, in an attempt to justify the situation.

**Still Taken from  
Research Film**



Elly had a slightly more relaxed attitude towards her quest, unlike her farming neighbour. She was naturally a reflective person and the internal aspect of beauty was perhaps the part that interested her most. She had returned to the Scholar, their centre of learning, to enhance her understanding of Sundara. Unlike most of the Teveners, Elly was able to take a step back and she knew that she couldn't aim for beauty when she didn't understand what exactly beauty was. Despite the new rules, the Coosurs that worked for Elly didn't have the tethers, even though they understood the need to remain close to their community. In fact none of the Coosur's had ever ran away, and despite all the protestations and changes in the community, they still loved to carve. 'Sundara' was one of many things that Elly and Glacial didn't see eye to eye on, despite their strong friendship.

The aura and haze given off by the completed totemical was still something that even Elly couldn't resist. This vibrancy and vitality created a quality that drew people towards the totemicals and certainly had an emotional affect upon them. This was something that Mohriza's notebooks could never capture. Only as you approached one, would you appreciate its resonance and the way that it made you feel. Elly sometimes wondered how this could ever equate to a word such as 'beauty'. In fact, it was often the thing that woke her in the night. Was it a dream or a nightmare? Elly often had a fleeting idea that beauty had perhaps already been achieved and that rather than being the bedfellow of perfection, it was something different. Returning to that moment, she walked towards the nearest totemical standing close to her hut. She placed her hand on the wood, following the contours of the indented fish scales, pausing only to concentrate on her breathing. The energy seemed to flow between the pole and Elly, and she was lost. When she consciously came back to the surface, she didn't know how long she had been standing there. It could have been seconds or tens of minutes. This was the affect these things had on her and it was impossible to know if others experienced them in quite the same thing. A chill in the air was developing and Elly walked slowly back towards her hut, and her warm bed.

The only thing that kept Glacial awake at night were thoughts of the Upper Lands. The myth said that the quest for beauty would be completed at the Upper Lands, with wood so precious and unique that only the very best totemical could be produced. The legend implied that the Upper Lands lay in a central and inhospitable part of the island. A high plateau that nobody had ever reached, at least in her lifetime. Glacial would give anything to get to this special place and get the very best totemical possible.

## **The Guest/Guessed Book**

The Guest/Guessed book is an attempt to gather a set of reflections or messages from those who had viewed the completed film or have responded in other ways to the thesis whilst in its state of becoming. Prior to viewing the film I explained how it may be different from typical educational research films and what they may be expecting, as the film sought to interrogate what I feel are important issues around education. I explained that following the film they would be asked to write something in response that would then become another layer of the research data itself. By anonymously submitting their writing they were consenting for it to be included in the thesis and viewers had the ability to opt out of this. At the end of the film I asked them to record their initial thoughts without speaking to the people around them – it was designed to be a personal account.

For some reason it was important to me that the record of this writing was aesthetically appropriate to the project. I purchased a brown spiral-bound scrap-book, which closed by tying the black ribbon into place. It is something that might be used to hold special memories or for writing in comments at a wedding. I wanted the

### **Sitting listening to the album by the band 'Viola Beach'**

Viola Beach were an indie band from Warrington at the beginning of their music career. In February 2016 they were all tragically killed in a road accident on their way back from a performance in Sweden. This week their posthumous album is set to reach number one in the charts.

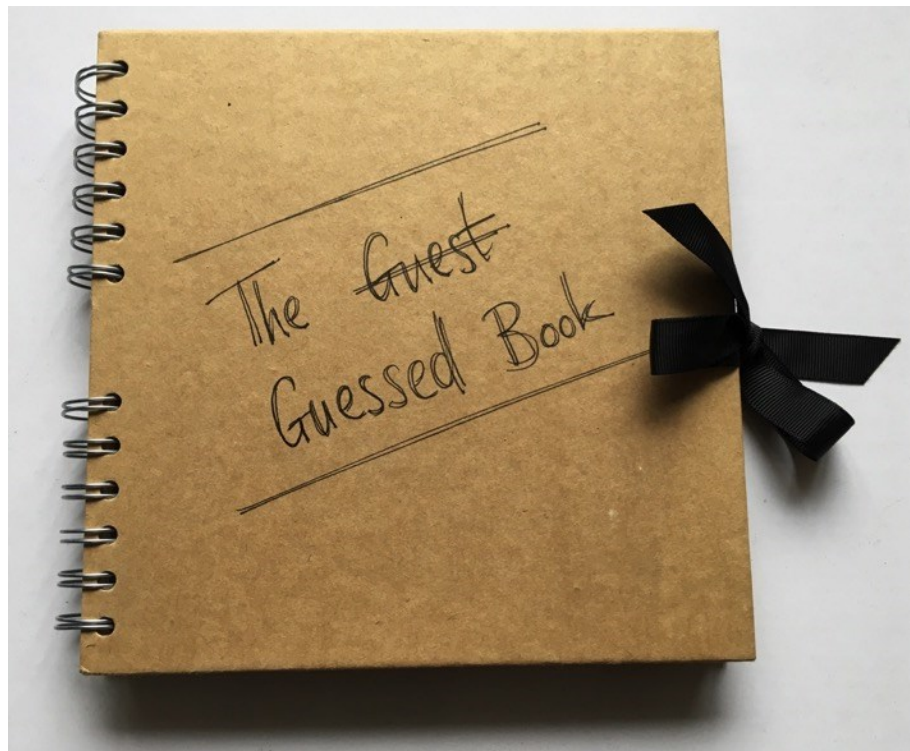
Listening to their music I am struck by the youthfulness and energy that exudes from the guitar music and basic lyrics. It reminds me of many young bands that have gone before them, but it is impossible to listen to it without noting the tinge of tragedy.

And 'I' am there again, always mediating what it is that 'I' experience. In one moment I am at university enjoying a new band in the student union – a sense of optimism and future washes over me. In the next, I am the 'Dad' imagining the loss of the family and how difficult it must be to listen to the lyrics, thinking of the imagined futures of my own children. Then at school in the music lesson, trying to relate the drivel of the music curriculum with my own secret musical experience and competence on the saxophone and piano. Wondering how I could have fitted into a band.

The music has a vitality and energy to it, yet the 'subject' experiencing that music hears something else. Something different to the other subjects.

**Research Journal Entry 2/8/16**

'Guest/Guessed Book' to both describe but also to perform. When reading Ssorin-Chaikov (2013) there were parallels in the way that the guest book for an art exhibition had become part of the exhibit itself. As he states, 'It collapsed the distinction between commentary and the objects of commentary, between the visitors and the exhibits – and, for me, between an ethnographic notebook and a conceptualist means to produce an ethnographic situation' (7). The play with the homophones is drawn from the people responding to the research being invited as a guest rather than being forced to comment, and the unpredictable (guessed) nature of their responses. The word 'guessed' also draws on the tentative comments/drawings that are personal, seeking in themselves to provoke rather than give a 'true' account of their responses.



My book could also attempt to break down the 'secret' notebook of the researcher. The smell, feel and tangibility render this as something else, and the aesthetic of the piece also blur the line as it approaches something 'art-like'. In a more archaic way it mirrors the 'comments' section on the video streaming website, youtube, but somehow retains so much more. It goes beyond what is actually being communicated to instead be more about the format, like comparing an email and a letter, written to a friend. The letter may be kept in the drawer as an important artefact and read many times, and the email read once to be lost in the ether. One

becomes treasured and the other becomes disposable. The ~~Guest~~/Guessed book is more dynamic and I hope to continue to gather new entries as more people view the film and interact with their own thoughts, feelings and affect in relation to schooling and atmospheres. It is always in a state of becoming and is never complete.



## Where is the shit?

*'In a traditional German toilet, the hole into which shit disappears after we flush is right at the front, so that shit is first laid out for us to sniff and inspect for traces of illness. In the typical French toilet, on the contrary, the hole is at the back, i.e. shit is supposed to disappear as quickly as possible. Finally, the Anglo-Saxon (English or American) toilet presents a synthesis, a mediation between these opposites: the toilet basin is full of water, so that the shit floats in it, visible, but not to be inspected.'*

Zizek (2008: 3)

### *Explosion*

This section of my writing is driven by a conversation with Geoff Bright who was my EdD reviewer, who on an annual basis checked my progress through the course as part of the university regulations. It was perhaps a throw-away comment when he said the phrase, 'where is the shit?' This was a fascinating question in relation to my research and one that lodged itself in my brain. I knew that there was something here that warranted further attention and I allowed the thought to mature slowly at the back of my mind. Like Lather's 'Angels', which I described earlier, I felt that there may be something productive in thinking with shit.

Others have paved the way in theorizing in relation to 'shit' not least the contributions to child development made by Freud and Lacan in relation to the anal stage of development. Baudrillard (1996) in 'Les System des Objects' theorized with shit in relation to design, and more recently Zizek has written and spoken of shit (1989; 2008). Banu (2016) uses the latter theorist to consider shit in relation to design in a fascinating paper which I am able to draw parallels in relation to the school context.

One emergent theme is that of systems of control in contrast to something much more chaotic. Baudrillard, taking the Freudian stance, draws on the idea that shit provides evidence of a perfectly functioning absorption system for the human body, using this metaphor to lead to the idea of homogenization. This homogenization comes about through the world being digested, absorbed and reformed. While Baudrillard related this to consumerism and design, I think that we can extend this conceptually, with his own words, 'everything has to



intercommunicate, everything has to be functional – no more secrets, no more mysteries, everything is organized, therefore everything is clear’ (Baudrillard 1996: 28). Indeed the impulse to (de)sign or signify everything as though part of a system stems from a seemingly primal fear of chaos.

Zizek is more influenced by Lacan and the ideas that emerge here are very different. Rather than seeing a totalized system, it is clogged. There is a failure of full absorption, control, assimilation and certainty. As Banu (2016: 7) puts it, ‘shit is not the culmination to a total system that produces meaning but rather its failure. The meaning of shit is not that it is functional fertilizer for more production, instead it resists a system of function’. Constipation is thus a key part of Zizek’s thinking where there is an incompleteness which accepts life as evolving, changing, incomplete and resistant to complete disclosure.

If we fold the notion of schooling into these theories and start to think alongside this shit we can ponder how schools may operate according to different digestive systems. Within this context do we encounter a system which is constipated by controls and order, or rather a chaotic, dynamic centre of discovery? There is naturally no simple answer to this, but it is clear through this research project where I position myself in relation to this question. I believe that the education system in the UK continues to constrict, forcing schools down very narrowed views of what teaching and learning comprise, the sphincter locked firmly in place. Driven by neoliberal forces we have moved to an ideological system much more like the one that Baudrillard recognizes. Here the child consumes the correct content, taught in the correct way, then digests this knowledge and then finally shifts it out into high stakes tests which dominate the system. Where chaos exists, then new discourses are invented, such as ‘low level disruption’ and we tighten systems such as behaviour management or we exclude children. The shit is put out of sight rather like the French toilet. There is no room here for smearing it around the classroom. Only one size fits all, which of course mirrors Zizek’s concept of ‘failure’ much more closely.

I believe that schools are therefore sanitized and cleansed, to ensure that the shit stays hidden. And this process itself is highly political. La Porte (1978) draws the parallels between waste matter and the political systems when he describes improved waste removal with the development of cities. Improved purification and

sanitation is ultimately associated with 'development' as there becomes a differentiation between private and public waste. Rather than the affective nature of the shitting process being at the fore, what Baudillard calls the 'pleasure of control' and Zizek terms 'pleasure of the escape, there is a move toward a focus on the placement and location of the shit. According to La Porte (1978) power is exerted by the removal and regulation of waste.

Here Zizek's toilet analogy that started this section is evoked, in thinking of the French toilet. The shit is out of sight and therefore out of mind, being unseen and removed to somewhere else. The industrial removal of the waste matter seems to

**Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917)**



allow society to pretend to be more

couth. It is literally out of sight and out of mind.

Maybe shit needs to be re-framed. Rather than see it as the human end product, something that is dead and lacking vitality, we

could actually notice its power and agency. A clue is given. The fart is a reminder of the shit. The odour fills and expands into the physical atmosphere and registers in the reactions of others. This might include disgust and the covering of the nose. In the classroom it is more likely to produce humour and lead to giggling, followed by a game of identifying the culprit. Rather than focusing on the toilet, as Zizek does, maybe the importance of the shit occurs in its continuing journey. The shit is turned into wastewater and is essentially recycled, with possible uses as farming fertilizer or it is fed into our water system. Gardeners regularly use horse and chicken manure to enrich their soil and help their gardens grow. The shit isn't forgotten but treated and allowed to continue its agentic journey.

### *Schooling shit*

Another power dynamic that strikes me in relation to this argument within the school context is how the process of toileting might actually be controlled. Practice varies considerably across schools, but there is a general discourse of children needing permission to use the toilet. Here there is an ordering of learning as being more important than the process of using the toilet. As a teacher I know that I have denied the child the right to use the toilet, instead asking them to wait for a more opportune moment to go.

### **Boredom**

**School is boring because you have to work. Everything about it is boring. I hate Literacy. But you have to work so you can do work when you are older. My step-Dad doesn't though. He does nothing! School is boring. I want to play out and play with my teddies. I would rather be playing out with my friends. I think it is a good school, but sometimes you can't be bothered doing sums. You just want to go home.**

### **Student voices – interview data**

or I have commented on the length of time that they have been in the toilet, implying toileting as a time-wasting tool. On reflection then I wonder if I have schooled the very idea of toileting with school to a statement of 'no shitting here'. In some high schools they even have staff whose role it is to regulate use of the toilets. Young people require the correct passes to use toilets during lesson time and bags must be left in a cloakroom area. As a result schools can control the toilets and eradicate the anti-social behaviours (smoking, fighting, bullying?) that permeated the 'school toilets' when I was at high school in the 1980-90s.

Relating 'atmosphere' to the discussion, his memories of school toilets were certainly atmospheric. These environment were to be avoided except in emergency situations. The smell of cigarette smoke or secret conversations permeated the space. It was a dark and foreboding area of the school, or at least that is how it exists in his memory. Specifically the shit must relate somehow to the gaseous atmosphere, particularly as the smell becomes airborne. However, unpleasant the thought is, we do breathe the shit in. And taken in a less literal way, with shit representing the negative aspects of school life, it is very much present, whatever forms of sanitation exists.

It is also important here to consider how this shit metaphor may function as part of a new materialist paradigm. Banu (2016) asks the question whether shit is human or non-human. It is an interesting question, starting the process of questioning the ontological status of shit. It acknowledges the materiality of the shit whilst recognising the complexity of the answer, embracing the messiness and uncertainty. Yet the new materialist would reframe such a questions since it slips into the 'violent hierarchy' of binary opposition, as recognized by Derrida. In new materialism there is flatter ontology of shifting and entangled assemblages. Here matter and discourse are co-implicated in dynamic and shifting assemblages and the bifurcation of nature is deeply resisted. The human is no longer privileged over the non-human and priority goes to difference, entanglement and un-decidability.

Where does this then leave the shit? Shit, as he understands it, becomes part of a complex food-human-toilet-shit-post(shit) assemblage where all parts are relevant. The shit is neither human or nonhuman. Bennett would recognize that the shit had a vital materiality. Whilst it may evoke a reaction of disgust it is much more than that. It has some agency at multiple levels. In interacting with the human the excrement has an impact on human behaviours such as when to visit the toilet, and it probably starts before this with the consumption of food stuffs. And it is important that the digestive process is not seen as simply a passage through a tube, but a complex assemblage of chemical, biological and bacterial interactions. On expulsion the shit continues to have a vitality, with the assemblage simply shifting and changing. We should maybe *wonder-with* the shit rather than remove it as something offensive.

Taking the less literal notion of shit as representing the negative or unseen or unspoken about parts of the school system, the new materialist can frame it in a very similar way. It is inevitable that there are complex and dynamic multiple-assemblages operating within the school context. As much of my research project has aimed to explore what is lacking within educational research, it is important to tune into the negative or less palatable aspects of these assemblages. Rather than flushing them away, or designing the toilet that avoids us seeing the shit, we need to look more closely. With the idea of an 'atmosphere' this is also even more challenging as it lacks a physical manifestation. It may emerge in the toilet bowl, yet we are unable to analyze it visually. Instead we have to search harder and adopt creative and different approaches.

### Feeling Safe

**In school we feel safe. If we didn't have the fences around the school then bad people...could get into the school. All the children could run away too – they could escape. The door handles are really high to keep the children safe – even though I can reach the handle! There is a button to release the door lock but if you had two people, one could jump and press the button while the other one pushes the door.**

### **Student voices – interview data**

### *Imposter syndrome*

The final part of this section on 'shit' returns to the recurring theme in this thesis of his own fears and insecurities about the doctoral research – the very processes that have pushed him towards writing in less conventional ways. Within many of the areas of research that he has dipped his toes into - such as narrative writing, sensory

methodologies, film, art, auto-ethnography – it appears there are examples of research that could be considered as 'shit'. He is using the term here to mean 'of poor quality and inadequate'. As he is so close to the writing and at times it is so personal, it is a challenge to attempt to view this from afar. This bricolage style of thesis has been a risky business. Is it a thesis or faeces? Quite possibly, but this is probably the wrong question to ask.

In similar ways to his resistance in writing and the way that he has attempted a style of writing that might jar any flow, something has appealed to him about the word 'shit'. The vulgarity of the word itself is stark and by putting this in writing it seems to make the vulgarity appear more pronounced. Banu (2016), in exploring other ways that the term has been used, suggests that it is a 'blatant affront to established decorum...in order to challenge...' It speaks of the author's perception of educational research as becoming constipated and is part of a call for research to explore more holistic aspects of school and education.

In concluding this section, it is pertinent to return to Zizek's discussion on differing toilets with which the author began. The different styles of toilets, even in Europe, is fascinating and reflects very different styles of society and education. And like atmospheres, he believes these differences should be celebrated and acknowledged. We should avoid the constant cleansing to instead focus on the uncomfortable or that which is 'out of sight'. Maybe this reflects the floating Anglo-Saxon toilet that he is accustomed to and the liberal ideological position. In answer

to the question 'where is the shit?' he has attempted to speak about the unspoken. The whole project plays with the metaphorical shit occurring withing schools. The shit is therefore everywhere and nowhere.



# Reaching a Plateau

## Chapter 3: The approaching storm

*The Wisp appears as a formless mist and is rarely seen around the island. He often materialises prior to the storms but he is omnipresent on the island. Visible in one place but at the same time all over the island. He is in the air and throughout the place and takes the form of both object and subject. Infusing the place with wisdom he materializes unannounced, an ecstasy and ethereal haze. The islanders only recognize him at certain points in his human-like form, a strange need to anthropomorphise and simplify someone/thing as complex as 'The Wisp'. He is everywhere and can be everything. Tonight, as the rain starts to fall, he floats as a blue ball amongst the trees. Like other aspects of the island he has a mystery surrounding him, with few residents ever glimpsing him. Like Morihza, the Wisp is able to see the processes that take place on the island and he too has an opinion and fears.*

The rain was falling faster now and to the north side of the island the deep growl of the thunder announced itself. The large white-grey clouds had gathered and were projecting high into the sky. They were towering and slowly advancing towards the villages. The Coosurs disliked the storms that ravage the island and as the low pressure fell across the grasslands they sought shelter. Most hid under the trees, huddled together for warmth. Some of the unlucky tethered creatures couldn't reach the woodland and instead huddled together around their own totemicals which lay prostrate upon the sodden ground. River cuddled into Cobain and sat chatting as the heavy pitter-pattering noise didn't lend itself to a good nights sleep. They both knew that the resulting tiredness would mean that the next day would be pretty unproductive, but to have the time to chat to each other without listening ears was always welcomed.

## Still Taken from Research Film



The Teveners were more fortunate as they sheltered in their cabins. Glacial stood at the window looking towards the horizon at the

approaching weather. She was concerned about how the lightening would effect the totemical that was only months away from completion. It wasn't long ago that one had been destroyed by the storm and this meant that Glacial had fallen in her position within the beauty rankings. She was determined not to let this happen again. All her Coosurs were sheltered under the tarpaulins placed around the totemicals, a last ditch attempt to offer another layer of protection. She was comforted by that fact that her Coosurs had some extra protection.

*The Wisp glows more brightly. He is perhaps the only person-thing on the island that enjoys these tropical storms. He sees them in a different way, a positive opportunity to add to the island rather than to take away. A chance to remind the islanders that all their 'progress' is only temporary and fleeting. If only they could recognize the storms as an opportunity, a chance to wipe the slate clean and to allow the island to regenerate. The Wisp notes the futility of their quest for beauty and wishes they could recognize the beauty that surrounded them. He would argue that the 'Upper Lands' doesn't exist, but instead is a false symbol leading them away from what was really important. His fear is that should the Teveners continue to exploit the lands, the negative impact on the ecosystem of the island will be irrevocable. The storms were one way he could encourage regeneration on the island and reverse some of this damage.*

Amazingly Morihza's blimp remained attached to its anchor despite the near gale force winds. He had reset the various cogs and pulleys to allow some of the air to pass through the cabin. The boat like structure had been angled so that it was facing the direction of the wind. The main anchor rope had also been lengthened to take them further away from the land, in the hope of reaching high above the

clouds. Taking their own shelter from the storm, a row of gulls sat comfortably along the long sail boom and Mohrizha was happy with this symbiotic relationship and some company. Thoughts of the islanders had given way to his own survival, kicking in as an instinct. He also knew there would be much to study in the days following the storm. He pulled up the collar on his faded-brown leather jacket in a vain attempt to provide him with some warm, and scratched his messy black beard as he paused for thought. His airship continued to be buffeted by the near gale force winds. The loud whistling kettle interrupted his thoughts and filled the tiny cabin with steam. Mohriza prepared his flask for some more fresh coffee, with the strong aroma providing some added comfort. The one thing that he had in common with the islanders that night, was that sleep would elude him.

## Affects of Materialisms

### Bees

*In every instant, two gates.*

*One opens to fragrant paradise, one  
to hell.*

*Mostly we go through neither.*

*Mostly we nod to our neighbor,*

*Lean down to pick up the paper,*

*Go back into the house.*

*But the faint cries – ecstasy?*

*horror?*

*Or did you think it is the sound of*

*distant bees,*

*Making only the thick honey of this  
good life?*

**Jane Hirshfield (1997)**

***The Lives of the Heart.***

**In Stewart (2011)**

Braidotti (2013) explores the 'posthuman' exploration of the nature-culture continuum, which she suggests is driven by inequalities that exist in society, during an era known as the anthropocene. Her writing resonates with the other feminist works that I have written about above as she notes the way that historically and presently, difference resulted in passing off entire categories of human beings as devalued; 'to be 'different from' came to mean to be 'less than' (Braidotti, 2013: 28). The notion of a post-human-other, including the nonhuman, is instead reframed. Like Bennett, Braidotti calls for a vitalist materialism, which hopes to makes sense of external dimensions

as well as aiming to overcome anthropocentrism. 'It is a force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains' (Braidotti, 2013: 60). Ingold (2013b) uses similar arguments in calling for the ensemble of biosocial relations to resist the artificial separating, with embodiment and materiality allow theorizing across disciplines. He suggests that 'we should speak...of anthropology as a one-field project' (Ingold, 2013b: 39). By this there is a call to flatten the ontology here and to conflate these larger 'labels' into something more equal. Whilst this supra-category will be even larger it simulataneously serves to make human-nonhuman a continuum.

Braidotti strongly calls for a critical theory that is dynamic and questioning, with theorists willing to take a risk 'of ridicule by experimenting with language that shocks established habits and deliberately provokes imaginative and emotional reactions' (Braidotti, 2013: 87). It is about recognizing power-struggles and

inequalities and in my work with atmospheres in schools, this drive is critically important. This thesis is about aiming to do something else with affect at the heart of it.

#### Image of the 'Manchester Bee'

Bennett, Stewart and Braidotti act in a functional way, causing me to view atmospheres differently...in an embodied and natural way. Whilst this remains loose at the present moment, other strands of the thesis seek to tighten these up. It reminds me that with social science research and with some of the methods I have chosen to



use, it is easy to become fixed on the subjects themselves and forget to be alert to otherness. Notions of 'affects', 'vitality', 'intensities' and 'vibrations' all sit comfortably with existing literature on atmospheres and my current conceptions of what constitutes an atmosphere. These serve to destabilise simplistic ideas of what the atmosphere could be described as and how these relate to the context they are in. Furthermore their writing resonates with me in my journey throughout the EdD course as I attempted to resist more traditional notions of research and knowledge and as I struggled to think in deeper and more complex ways. Finding a paradigmatic position that you are comfortable with is quite emancipatory for me and supported the research project in finding its pathways through the thesis.

Returning to the parallel train track of Thrift (2008) in his discussion on affect, he draws on Spinoza and Deleuze's idea of a world in a constant state of becoming. Spinoza was a monist, believing that there was only one substance in the universe: humans and all nonhumans could only be modes of this one unfolding substance. In this complex philosophy, 'thinking' and 'doing' become aspects of the same thing, expressed in two registers. In terms of affect, this is a property of an active outcome of an encounter, impacting upon the body and mind in action (both in positive; 'euphoric', and negative 'dysphoric' ways). In Deleuzian terms then, the interplay between the event and the bodies. Emotion, according to Spinoza is therefore detached 'from the realms of responses and situations and attached instead to action and encounters as the affections of substance or of its attributes and as *greater or lesser forces of existing*. This further helps to make the

distinction between emotions and affect. Emotions therefore become firmly a part of '*nature*, of the same order as storms or floods' (Thrift, 2008: 178).

Relations between bodies, minds and affects becomes a critical part of this way of thinking and Deleuze (1988) adds an ethological spin to the inseparability of relations. Within the complexity, Deleuze is unable to grasp what human bodies and minds might be capable of in any one encounter, nor in a wider sense what human beings may be able to build, so affects are 'the nonhuman becomings of man' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 169). This leads towards a language/practice with differing speeds and intensities, compositions and combinations that humans may be able to bring into play.

'A body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity. We call longitude of a body the set of relations of speed and slowness, of momentum and rest, between particles that compose it from this point of view, that is, unformed elements. We call altitude the set of affects that occupy a body at each moment, that is, the intensive states of an anonymous force (force for existing, capacity for being affected). In this way we construct the map of the body. The longitudes and latitudes together constitute Nature, the plane of immanence or consistency, which is always variable and constantly being altered, composed and recomposed by individuals and collectivities.'

(Deleuze, 1988: 127-128)

This quotation links well with moves to post-human ways of thinking and begins to acknowledge the way that affective atmospheres may relate to the intensities of bodies, with bodies conceived in this much broader sense. Through repetition this point will become more intense at other places in the thesis.

Affect is therefore thought of as always emergent according to Spinoza-Deleuze. Massumi captures this when writing:

'Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction it is...  
Emotion is the most intense (and contracted) expression of that capture

– and of the fact that something has always and again escaped. Something remains unactualised, inseparable from but unassimilable to any particular, functionally anchored perspective. That is why all emotion is more or less disorientating, and why it is classically described as being outside of oneself, at the very point at which one is most intimately and unshareably in contact with oneself and one's vitality...'

(Massumi, 2002: 35)

This emergence is important in also opening up the possibilities of how affect may move and extend. Without an anchor there is a drifting sense in relation to atmospheres.

In drawing these ideas together it is now clearer that atmospheres are an embodied interplay between all things, both human and nonhuman. It is something that is constantly changing, in a state of flux and with rising and falling intensities. I reiterate that whilst we as humans are inseparable from the atmosphere it isn't something that we are able to control or manipulate. Like the weather, it eludes our control and instead we can predict it (rightly and wrongly), experience it, and take pleasure (and pain) from it. The posthuman influence reminds me that the 'we' I discuss is not just *anthropos* (humans), but the whole of the bios. The implications from Massumi (2002) are that the vitality of atmosphere is always present but not always perceived. It is continually there in the background.



## School ethos

It feels like all of my life I have been in school, either as a pupil or as a teacher. Exploring an atmosphere within this context is important to me, partly because it is an environment that I know well, but also because it is an original topic of research, able to make a unique contribution to knowledge. Within my professional context I have worked in multiple schools as an outreach teacher for a number of years. It staggers me how different each of them felt, not only to me, but also to the pupils that I found myself working with. What was it that made them different? The more I thought about this, the more I wasn't quite able to capture or articulate what it was. Multiple factors seemed to converge to create a feeling or affect that differed between each educational setting. Discussing this with colleagues, I understood that this was felt by other staff working in the same role as me, rather than something particular to me.

### **Happy, Healthy and Aiming High**

**[Research school] is a warm, happy, high achieving and welcoming Church of England Primary School. Our children feel safe and everyone is valued, respected as an individual and encouraged to achieve their full potential.**

***Statement from Research School website***

The initial answer to my question of difference was something to do with the ethos of the school. An ethos is something that is often spoken of in schools and is also present on school website and in glossy brochures, with links to mission statements and values. The word ethos is also present in the Teachers Standards where teachers must 'contribute to... the ethos' and 'have proper and professional regard for the ethos' (Department for Education, 2011). But this quickly became a dead-end in my critical thinking. Whilst these clues spoke of an ethos as 'real' and having some stability, the word continued to behave elusively. The meaning of ethos blurred with terms like 'culture', 'climate', 'ethics' and 'values' and because of this there exists little academic literature about the term. Some writers instead looked at school culture as it had greater solidity than ethos (Solvassen, 2005; Glover and Coleman, 2005)

There is a recognition that the pursuit of ethos is likely to lead to more tensions and dilemmas, and that it is loaded with political meaning. For example, Bragg and Manchester (2011) suggest that definitions of ethos are unhelpful and circular and instead focus on 'what it does' rather than 'what it is'. McLaughlin (2005) states that there is no single meaning of 'ethos' and encourages embracing a range of meanings that would be able to yield a persuasive and practical application to educational influence. Donnelly (2000) sees ethos as a process with inherent contradictions and inconsistencies. These are all sound contributions to a discussion on ethos but what turns me away from ethos is its neatness and the way it can be controlled and contrived. I feel like we have arrived back at a potential Disney approach to education.



**Image of Art Exhibition  
'Dismaland.'  
Banksy (2016)**

This is partly because ethos really came into fruition in the 1980s when educational policies around school improvement and school

effectiveness. Schools are sites of major political influence and since the 1988 Education Act schools have experienced market-orientated reforms, with the results being the need to publicize and promote your school. This is where branding and espousing an ethos originated, in order to make your school stand out from another. Under current educational agendas of 'academies' and 'free schools' this is something that is continuing to pervade the landscape. There is a huge risk that a stated ethos becomes little more than a 'logo or artefact' and nothing to do with the lived experience of school life (Schein, 2004). There is some irony in looking at the quoted ethos statement from the research school on the previous page. In fact it is so generic that it could describe any school. It is certainly does little to capture anything that is distinctive or celebratory about the research school, even though I believe there are many of these.

Some authors are more critical of 'ethos' and the way it is represented. Bragg and Manchester (2011) recognize the social-political aspects of an ethos and the way that class may function within schools. Where middle-class values underpin the ethos these are seen as 'more valuable' and immediately has an exclusory impact on those with class-based differences. They also recognize how ethos is not only shaped by educational policy, social, economic and cultural conditions, but also by local and national groups and tradition, even by forces such as capitalism, globalization and neo-liberalism. Alder (1993) seems to be the only writer to recognize links with atmosphere and this influences her thinking on ethos, suggesting that the ethos is at the boundary of linguistic expressibility. She defines ethos as:

'the unique, pervasive atmosphere or mood of the organization which is brought about by activities or behaviour, primarily in the realm of social interaction and to a lesser extent in matters to do with the environment, of members of the school, and [ethos is] recognized initially on an experiential rather than cognitive level'.

(Alder, 1993: 69)

While we begin to get somewhere with a more critical stance about 'ethos' it remained stubbornly in place with reference to my research project. I was concerned that the nature of 'ethos' would drive my research questions and methodology in certain directions, leading to places that I did not wish to go. I was concerned that I would get stuck in circular arguments about what an 'ethos' is and how it was experienced and ultimately I was troubled by the banality of this. My desire was to do more with the thesis and when the notion of 'atmosphere' arrived this opened a window of opportunity. Ethos was redundant as it isn't able to capture the vitality and intensity of atmosphere that I have already explored. Ethos quite simply did not excite me anymore, and an enthusiasm for my own research seemed a good aim for this project.

Despite the lack of research in this field, schools offer a fascinating context in which to explore an atmosphere. As Bragg and Manchester (2011) suggest childhood memories of school do not speak of curriculum, knowledge or tests. Instead it is enduring factors that retain an intensity, relating to experiences of pain, pleasure, embarrassment and humiliation. Memories appear driven more by

affect than anything else. Another advantage that I feel the atmosphere has over ethos, is that ethos is often conceived as this over-arching general state which is static. The atmosphere can be much more dynamic and I consider it gives an opportunity to look at the variance at the individual (subject-object) level. One child's experience of the same school seems likely to vary from the next child.

Schools do not immediately spring to mind as environments that are rich in atmosphere. From my experiences at the 2015 atmospheres conference, the places that had been researched seemed to ooze an atmosphere in all its sensory glory; Billingsgate Fish Market, a declining seaside town, a street food market, a flatshare, the weather. But actually I feel that the school is exactly the place to explore an atmosphere, linked to the idea that the atmosphere is pervasive, seemingly autonomous, and always there – waiting to be perceived. Braidotti (2013) and Stewart (2007) use narrative experiences to drive forward their writing but it concerns me that these often appear as 'major' moments or more significant events. I wonder if the spaces to be attentive to are the minor moments, the everyday. Perhaps in these spaces and silences we will find more productive and interesting ways to play with atmosphere. Or indeed maybe the boundary between 'major' and 'minor' is the blurred space

where we could catch a glimpse of something else.

### **Mirror**

**I am silver and exact. I have no  
preconceptions.  
What ever you see I swallow  
immediately  
Just as it is, unmisted by love or  
dislike.  
I am not cruel, only truthful---  
The eye of a little god, four-  
cornered.  
Most of the time I meditate on the  
opposite wall.  
It is pink, with speckles. I have  
looked at it so long  
I think it is a part of my heart. But  
it flickers.  
Faces and darkness separate us  
over and over.**

**Now I am a lake. A woman bends  
over me,  
Searching my reaches for what  
she really is.  
Then she turns to those liars, the  
candles or the moon.  
I see her back, and reflect it  
faithfully.  
She rewards me with tears and an  
agitation of hands.  
I am important to her. She comes  
and goes.  
Each morning it is her face that  
replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young  
girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day,  
like a terrible fish.**

**Sylvia Plath (1981)**

# Reaching a Plateau

## Chapter 4: The Upper Lands

He was jolted awake by a flock of birds passing close to the blimp, his resting gulls leaving to join the others. Sleep had apparently come at some point in the night and Mohriza was surprised to find himself suddenly rousing. He quickly ran to his levers and cogs, checking the tension of the wires and reviewing that everything was intact. He was lucky. There were only a few tears in the fabric of the blimp and more chaos in the cabin where bits and bobs had fallen from the shelves and cupboards. A couple of hours of tidying and sewing would soon fix these and with relief he felt his breathing slow as his body released some of the tension and worry.

The next issue was whether his scopes were still in place. Running to the veranda he was delighted that all was also well here. A quick glance in some of the scopes showed that the villagers were also stirring and some were already busy making repairs. From above the many ant-like dots scurried around with a strong sense of purpose, which looked almost comical. For some reason he was drawn to his interior eye-glass and he peered down into the deep forests. As the wispy clouds slowly abated, the plateau suddenly came into view. Mohriza felt lucky to be one of only a few people to have had sight of the plateau. Remotely located within the central part of the island it held mythical status as the sacred 'Upper Lands'. Its steep sided cliffs and occasional waterfalls added to its aura as a remote, untouched part of the island.

It was on one of his early field visits that a villager had told him the folk story of the Upper Lands. It began one evening when a tribe had ventured further afield into the forests. Already the 'Sundara' race had begun, aiming to create the most beautiful symbolic totemical, as each tribe strived for its best. The storm had come then and as the search party tracked through the woods they had reached the sheer cliffs surrounding the plateau. Ill equipped for the worsening weather and unable to turn back, they had decided to camp for the night in one of the small open caves at the base of the cliff. As they slept, the winds had gathered pace and distant trees had begun to lose their branches or their footings in the soil altogether. None of the hunters were able to understand how, but by the next



morning the exit of their cave was blocked by seven tree trunks arranged in perfect columns. They had been imprisoned by the island itself. Furthermore the qualities of the wood were unlike any they had seen before. They had been relaxed at first and knew that with all their equipment it wouldn't be long until they had broken free. But the first time that the heavy axe was swung towards a log, they realized that something was very different. The sharpened blade had been unable to penetrate the wood, bouncing back time and time again. They remained trapped. The panic was only abated three days later when a herd of passing Coosur had



heard their cries for help. With ease they had used their extended large front incisors to carve through the logs and release the desperate Teveners.

#### **Still Taken from Research Film**

Legend had it that this group of hunters had made a pact not to reveal the story to their people. But as they returned to the village with open arms and tears, the story was already being embellished and told around the various camp fires. Over the years the story twisted and changed until it was believed that at the top of the Upper Lands existed a special forest. A plateau blessed with the finest hard wood that only the Coosur were able to carve. This was how the Upper Lands had become the ultimate aim in the Teveners quest for beauty. The trees of the Upper Lands would be able to produce the finest totemicals know to the island. At the same time there was a fear. The island had trapped the men to protect itself as though it had its own agency. Since then, nobody had repeated the journey to the Upper Lands and that fact in itself communicated how the islanders really felt.

Mohriza was mesmerized by this story and had written it in one of his earliest field notebooks. His illustrations added to the quality of the tale and it was these pages that he regularly returned to and pored over. On later returns to the island Mohriza would walk the jungle in search of the Upper Lands yet it always was just out of reach, hidden behind the next ridge or covered with thick, impassable bush. When



he felt that he was getting closer it seemed to shift and disorientate him so that he ultimately remained lost and further away with each step. The airship had given Mohriza a completely different perspective and that plateau had finally revealed itself. More notebooks had been filled with his observations but he couldn't find it within himself to share these notes with the islanders. Back then he didn't want to disappoint them at a time when he was building their trust and becoming an accepted researcher of their community. Now it felt like the opportunity to share this unspoken truth had passed.

On this post-storm morning the light was perfect as Mohriza peered through his most powerful eye scope. The mist had almost completely vanished and the impressive plateau towered out of the forest. It was an uninterrupted view. He gathered another part-filled notebook to record this early observation, turning and pressing down a new page. Although he knew he had written the same thing before, with his recently sharpened pencil he wrote:

'The plateau was visible again today. I confirm that the whole plateaus lies completely barren with no growth evident. There are no trees growing in place and there appears no plant succession since my last entry. The only life appears to be the low-lying heather-like scrub plant.'

Should the Teveners' mythical tree exist, Mohriza appeared to be the only one who understood that the Upper Lands was not where this would be found. It was a barren landscape which was only going to lead to disappointment. The legend certainly did not match the reality.

## Virtual and Actual Atmospheres

### *Virtual and Actual*

Drawing on the philosophy of Deleuze once again, here I consider how the concepts of the *virtual* and *actual* would relate to an atmosphere. The actual describes the object, whilst the virtual is something more - a sensation expressed through the intensities of pure becomings. Williams (2003: 7) illustrates this point by describing a coconut; an actual coconut as well as the common intensities of the virtual ('to become hard, to become grainy, to become hairy, to quench to nourish'). Rather than being two separate realms these should be considered as two sides of the same coin. This allows a further Deleuzian concept to enter the scene, that of 'the event', Deleuze considers the event as simultaneously actual and virtual.

This links back to arguments of representation. Deleuze makes the point that since we get stuck with the actual, there is a need to learn to forget. By this it means that in order to tune into the virtual we need to resist seeing the world as fixed. Here there is a stance of seeing the reality of things that are not actual or nameable. As Williams states (2003: 8) 'they cannot belong to that realm because, if they were identifiable – that is, measureable and comparable – then sensation and significance would be secondary to external structures of measurement and value'. The importance of virtual intensities as a significant event is therefore emphasized. Research that interrogates these differences for themselves is of paramount importance. Relating atmospheres to the virtual and actual helps to develop a philosophy of atmospheres. My conceptualization of atmospheres seems to lend itself to the virtual aspects, as I have tuned in to the intensities and event, whilst also recognizing the atmosphere as always becoming.

Part of the struggle stems from the fact that when many people think of an atmosphere they think of the actual atmosphere, something that might sit more comfortably with a term like 'ethos'. That is a thing that is recognizable and exists. This is the distinct atmosphere as described, for example, in research by Concha (2015) and Edensor (2015). The problem here is that even the actual-atmosphere does not have a physical form, which further complicates the issue. Without a physical form, at a certain level, it makes these concepts difficult to comprehend.

Deleuze's thinking (1994: 259-61, 332-334) in relation to Death may be useful here, since it shares an abstraction which is comparable to the atmosphere.

Death is considered as existing in these two realms, with an actual death (the ceasing of your heartbeat and brain activity) as well as a series of virtual deaths, considered as the ways that ones becomings lead us to irrevocably change. These virtual deaths are small deaths or rebirths where the self adjusts to new intensities. The virtual death is less feared than the actual death from which one may flee the 'violent' ending. Williams (2003: 10) suggests that there may be 'something revivifying in the expression of becomings, they make a life that must end in death one that participates in intensities (I just had to feel the whip of sea spray one last time).' This resonates with me as the way that life is affected – the virtual aspects of a life are vitally important. This ultimately leads us back to the concept of 'forgetting', since in order to live one must ignore the fear of an actual death and not allow this to dictate life. Instead we allow sensations and intensities to guide life and resist the limitations that our body and mind imply. Deleuze borrows from Spinoza when saying 'we do not know what our bodies are capable of' – and therefore implores us to experiment with our bodies and minds in order to live intensely.

Naming 'an atmosphere' then is potentially equivalent to the actual death. It draws a marker in the sand and it causes a cessation of the atmosphere as though frozen in time. However, the atmosphere refuses to cease. What is demanded here is a forgetting of this named atmosphere, in order to allow the repeating virtual atmosphere to envelop and change. As with death, there is a rebirth of the atmosphere as it continues to be becoming and have virtual intensities. It is the virtual atmosphere that resists capture and representation. It is this that seems more real to me and has always drawn my research towards it. Repetition then becomes a critical aspect of Deleuze's philosophy, and explains how the actual and virtual function, helping to develop the philosophy of atmosphere. Through repetition things acquire a fixity giving them parts and therefore boundaries. Repetition here would then link with the aforementioned actual-atmosphere. Returning to the context of the school environment, there is a need to allow schools to forget how they describe themselves, for this immediately allows them to retune and to search for the repetitions and intensities. The notion of a school

ethos abandons such intensities and virtualities, and whilst this may lend itself to description, it is always never enough.

### *Repetitions*

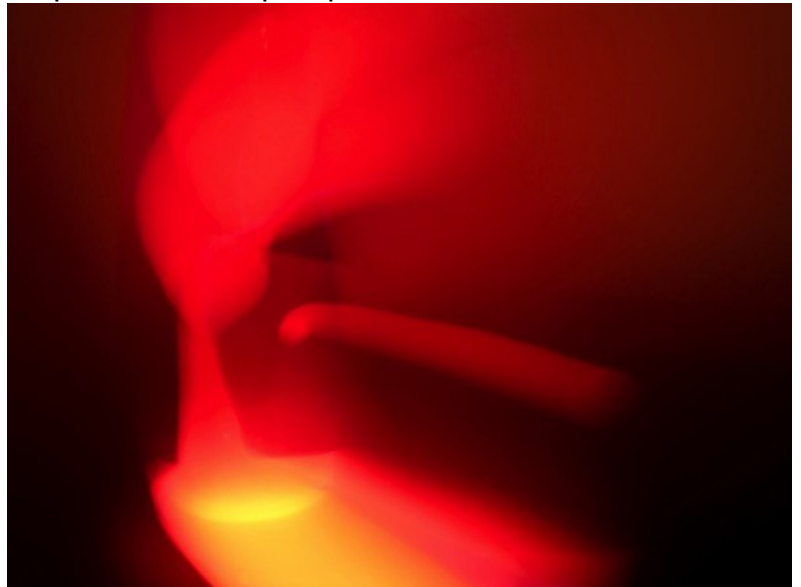
Deleuze equates three facets of repetition. The first of these is habit. Schools are institutions that rely on habit and the repetitions that happen are infinite – the timings of the day, the taking of the register, the controlling of the body with toileting and eating, and the regularity of curriculum. These are repetitions that happen multiple times each day and at the very least daily. Memory is the second aspect of repetition and leads to the familiar recognition of the thing. It is easy to see how schools would facilitate a repetition that leads to memory forming and recognition. When the youngest child begins their formal school education, there is an institutionalization and rule learning that utilizes repetition.

When taken together, habit and memory combine to become the virtual. Williams (2003: 12) uses the example of a territory or space, to explain this, as the repeated engagement with the territory is vitally important. But it is always much more than this as there are an infinite number of abstracts impacting on this territory: 'the changing cycles of weather, the repeated paths of other animals, the cycle of aging of the animal, the flux of seasons, the encroachment of civilization that beats to human and mechanical rhythms, the ebb and flow of conflicting desires and emotions, the mutation of vegetation and species.' This is a repeated series where there is always a requirement for there to be an abstraction and the virtual aspect of the thing is as real as the actual. Deleuze considers the third repetition as a 'dice throw' whereby the outcome is always unknown, as he relates virtual concepts of the self. Rather than an organized and conscious idea of the self it is instead a 'fractured self' and a 'dissolved self'. Here I reiterate a point from elsewhere around attempting to understand atmosphere away from the usual concepts of cause and effect. This 'dice throw' is another opportunity to consider the atmosphere as disorganized, dissolved and fractured – indeed to destroy the sense of cause and effect around atmosphere.

Through a process of synthesis these Deleuzian notions become significant. The train journey taken everyday is different and significant each day as it involves intensities which are relational with previous and future journeys. As a result you change with each train journey and with the sensations and intensities that exist

there. As Williams puts it, 'as individual we express pure differences and intensities, but many more and differently than we can be conscious of, or can capture in representation (you are much more than you think you are. Your conscious choice of actual possibilities does not capture what you really are as a virtual and actual event)' (Williams, 2003: 16).

Returning to the atmosphere I can understand this as a pure difference and as an event that is always becoming. There is relevance in considering the atmosphere as on the one hand reified through the repetitions that occur but at the same time it is fractured or dissolved through these processes of repetition. Its intensities flux and shift so that the virtual aspect of the atmosphere has a tendency to dominate as it shimmers and its intensities vibrate. The virtual and actual realms of the atmosphere envelop or cover one another, allowing different aspects to have greater clarity or obscurity. The phrase 'envelop' is productive here as it allows the boundaries between different aspects of the environment to become blurred. Furthermore when considering the perceived atmosphere for the subject this envelopment and covering of them may be part of this process.



**Oliver Durand (2006) *Magma***

#### *Movements and Event*

Williams (2003) writes eloquently to describe the way repetitions may be allied to differences. It is suggested that these intense reactions become doubled and whilst something is sensed in the same way there is also a sensation of a profound difference. One example is way that a celebration through its repetitions may be perceived as different from a celebration at the same time, maybe even a betrayal. In other words the repetitions and differences are something that simultaneously occur rather than being different states. This fits well with my thinking in relation to atmospheres and helps to explain the ways that the 'same' atmosphere within a certain setting may be perceived and described in multiple

ways. The same noisy classroom atmosphere may then be experienced as exciting and vibrant, whilst at the same time others may experience it as chaotic and distracting.

The description of the atmosphere itself is also limiting, since the written form is ultimately one form of representation. If emotions, bodies and contexts are conceptualized as movements it is easy to see that one fixed identity would be inadequate. Rather these would never be fully captured. This point also fits with the idea of the envelopment within the repetition. The movement within this repetition allows the pure variations and the constant state of becoming. Deleuze would refer to this as the eternal return, where only becoming returns and not identity. Indeed this supports the approaches I have taken within the thesis to create movement and to use repetition and jolts as part of the written and visual text.

The event becomes more than something that is an actual event for an identifiable person (the school child, the teacher). Instead the event should be considered as primarily at the virtual level – something that resists identification. The event becomes relational between sensation and actualities (it feels oppressive in here) that ‘expresses an intensity that envelops others’ (the intensities in fear, passion, hopelessness, de-motivation) (Williams, 2003: 74). As the intensities become reconfigured it leads to different relations of clarity and obscurity (the idea of learning – to engage, to be interested – becomes clear. The idea of inclusion – to be equal, to thrive – recede). Again the thesis attempts to play with the tensions of clarity and obscurity as the reader negotiates this and moves between states of the virtual and actual.



# Reaching a Plateau

## Chapter 5: The Elder Coosur

Lost in the moment. Your teeth sliding through the wood. The camaraderie with your kinship. The slow but significant progress as the thing begins to take shape. Hours passing in the blink of an eye. It was never enough to describe the process of totemical-carving to the uninitiated. It was something that truly had to be felt. The smell of the wood and the uniqueness of each piece acted like memory markers for the elder Coosur. It would be easy for the onlooker to think that after years of enforced carving as part of your time in the farms, the Coosur would reject and resist the need to produce totemicals. It was much more complex than that. The Coosur had an instinctive need to carve, an innate requirement to produce something of beauty. Not even Mohriza would understand this.

After graduation the Coosur would leave the farms and join the Elders at the villages to the south side of the island. They would then become Elders and their time would be spent on various tasks as part of village life, including totemical production. The main difference here was that the production of totemicals was not one of competition. This was not a futile attempt to outdo the next person. Instead it was the intrinsic pleasure that was to be had from the carving combined with the satisfaction and pride associated with the completed totemical. It was this subtlety that was lost on the Teveners, but things had been like this for many years and there was unlikely to be any changes.



**Still Taken from Research Film**

## Chapter 6: Wispy thoughts

*Darkness and the island is still. The Wisp floats around the villages noticing the last glowing embers from the fires. The silence is broken by the occasional snore emanating from one of the wooden huts. The Coosur are asleep too, resting their heads on each others' furry back in a long row, a repeated pattern like an infinity mirror. He continues on his path surveying the status of his beloved island as he had done so for hundreds of years. Over time he had developed his own philosophy on the strange interchange that existed between the Teveners and Coosur. To him the strangest thing about the relationship is the futile quest for beauty.*

***'I don't trust it,'<sup>1</sup> he mutters to himself.***

*Beauty was something that the Wisp believed just couldn't possibly exist, at least in the form that the islanders desired. It is an aspirational quality that always remained slightly out of reach. Instead he wonders why the islanders couldn't stop for one minute and admire the island in its current, albeit fragile state. The more it seemed that the Teveners pushed towards the illusive quality of beauty, and the more they controlled and manipulated the Coosur, the more difficult things seemed to become. The tethers on the young Coosur were the most recent symbol of this. Carving was only one small aspect of island life and the obsession, in the Wisp's opinion, was actually causing some Coosur to reject their carving skills and lose their love of the process. The ecstasies of carving were being reduced to a monotonous task. This was then leading to having to incentivize the Coosur, with sugar beet and an array of progressive medals. A group now hooked on praise and rewards.*

***'Why is it that the [Teveners] seem to think that obedience is the key to learning and not freedom?'<sup>2</sup> The Wisp wondered to himself. If only the Coosur could be given a voice. If only the fakeness of the current way of life could be revealed.***

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from 'Guest/Guessed Book'. Teacher

<sup>2</sup> Quote from 'Guest/Guessed Book'. Student Teacher

## Morality

I confess to being a person with a strong sense of feeling and emotion – I am affected and allow this prepersonal state to rise to the surface. It is a confession at this point in my writing as previously I have been trying to avoid stating this. I understood that I am implicated in the very processes of writing and my assignments during the earlier taught phase of the course explored identity and the impact this may have on professional issues. But somehow I have been seeking a neutrality in my research. This is in part a response to my methodological approach as an attempt to destabilize thinking and have a productive space for discussion and thought. My concern was that by stating my case and my own positioning, this would compromise the writing, replacing something that I wished to destabilize with my own sense of stability.

Whilst I have alluded to my career as an outreach teacher I have not spoken of the nature of work, supporting pupils who were experiencing failure at school, many of whom were at risk of permanent exclusion. Unlike some of my colleagues, my own experiences of education, and particularly at primary school, were very positive. I was an able student who made friends, followed the rules and thrived in this kind of environment. I attended primary school prior to the introduction of the national curriculum and my memories are rather joyous. I envisage an atmosphere where there was more time, where I learnt in more independent ways on topics that interested me. I remember the art and creativity in the school and a feeling of a holistic education. Even if I take off the rose-tinted spectacles, I distinctly remember my friends and also the Friday afternoon video that we watched every week. Perhaps it is these memories that inspired me to pursue my own career as a primary school teacher.

For some of my colleagues school was a more unpleasant experience, associated with either academic failure and/or exclusion from school. Perhaps this is what motivated them to become behaviour support teachers. These memories match those that are being formed currently by some of the pupils that I work with. In my opinion these are some of the brightest and creative individuals and yet due to a myriad of reasons school is a place with negative experiences for them. And this is the point that my heckles rise. Amongst a political agenda of so-called 'inclusion' current educational policy is serving to exclude many pupils. The standards

agenda, in particular, teaches us that the only thing that really matters are results and assessments. Everything seems to be framed around attainment. Anything schools try and do must be measured and the impact upon assessments known.

But I believe we are failing. Failing many pupils. At this point I could move off into complex arguments around neo-liberalism, but I don't think this is needed. Yet it is worth noting that the political and economic drivers of neoliberalism have created an education system obsessed with performativity (of pupils and staff), accountability and lack of professional trust in teachers. Schooling is reduced to a functional delivery of a standard curriculum and an obsession at raising attainment levels, at the expense of creativity, inclusion and motivation for learning. There are many texts out there that support my opinions about how narrow schools have become and how an alternative is needed (eg. Ball, 2008; Coffield and Williamson, 2012). And that isn't to say that there aren't schools out there that resist and try alternative approaches, despite these agendas. There are in fact some reasons to be positive, and my own experiences of outdoor education and working with pupils on Forest School projects is a small space of contentment, resistance and subversion. This is because it still avoids the mechanisms of disciplinary surveillance and places children and childhood at the heart of the approach.

My positioning about schools and the pervading atmosphere in them is not neutral nor benign. I am critical of what is currently happening and this is one reason that in my research I am aiming to open up the debate. Through exploring an atmosphere in one particular school I am enquiring about the everyday practices. Why do we sit on plastic chairs or carpets? Why do we eat lunch from a plastic tray? What do you think and feel about school? And other questions – open ones, ones that the pupils think of themselves. Good questions that get lost in the everyday pace and structures of schooling.

**Laughter on the Street**

**Walking into work, close to the university building. A Mum walking her two children to school. The 'noticing' was the laughter. Why did this jar? It was different. It was prolonged laughter. Maybe my tendency to think this way is driven by a clichéd image of parent and child walking with no interaction. No discussion.**

**Walking some distance apart. I got drawn in. I crossed the road at the zebra crossing just to walk past them, to drink in the laughter. It seemed to infect me, to lift my mood.**

**I imagined what a positive start to the day these children would have. I wanted to share in the joke. I wondered whether the older girl was laughing at her brother, but their faces seemed to show it as a truly shared and equal expression of joy.**

**Research Journal Entry 10/3/2015**

The whole project is driven by a personal ethics of caring. Caring as a teacher about my own pupils and wanting the best from them. Caring about pupils who are being excluded

and wondering how they may experience the 'ethos of the school' and the paradox that exists there. Caring as a parent about my own primary-aged pupils and seeing another perspective of the narrowed education that we appear to be offering in the UK is a further motivator. And caring that other teachers may be encouraged to care about similar things. Braidotti (2013: 37) notes that historically 'the great emancipatory movements of postmodernity are driven and fuelled by the resurgent 'others': eg. women's rights movement, anti-racism etc...'.

Yet I feel like the pupils are voiceless and an aim of this work is to experiment with ways to give pupils an opportunity to 'talk' about school, and to shape what it is they think education is about. I

hope that there  
are emancipatory  
tones within the  
multiple layers of  
the project.

This echoes my  
words on the  
morality of this  
thesis. In many  
senses  
'atmospheres'  
within this project  
are serving as a

Cut outs

backdrop – an exploratory space. I am deeply interested in the exploration of this alongside the pupils within the research school, although in itself it is never enough. This research project is also a way for me to articulate a dissatisfaction with the current educational status quo. It is an act of resistance as well as a call to arms. That is the purpose of the destabilization that I have already spoken about – to ask teachers to think beyond pedagogy to ask deeper questions about the purposes and practices of schooling. Furthermore, the project itself is an act of enquiry as I experiment with ways to create a multiple-layered and stimulating written piece. This is another form of resistance as I use film and other media to play with the traditions of writing a doctoral thesis. There will be nothing neat about this project nor any satisfactory conclusions, since it resists becoming contained and instead plays around at the blurry borders. Instead I wish to create a piece that acts against representation and gives me/you a chance to think. I will actively reflect on the processes and discuss the alternative sources of data that I have engaged with. Some will question this approach and as I move through the different acts I will attempt to weave in these multiple layers and justify some of the decisions I have made along the way.

I recognize that within my positioning there is an obvious tension; that of my methodological standpoint and my desire to probe and question rather than make changes to the education system and be proactive. It is a similar argument taken by critical postmodern thinkers such as Žižek (eg. 1989) who argue that postmodernism has left us with little change and hasn't been empowering or



emancipatory. It is  
argued that the  
point of the  
research should be  
to motivate and  
advance arguments  
rather than getting  
stuck within the  
argument. I  
recognize that this  
could be a criticism  
of my work,  
however I continue

Cut outs

to resist articulating a 'school' that is 'better' than the current system. This is because I don't feel it is my job to do this. Answering a research question like this will lead me to a representational approach, and as soon as I say what is 'better' it will become politically and socially fixed and immediately flawed. Plus understanding and debating concepts such as 'better' would be unproductive to me within this work. Instead my role is to guide the reader through an approach that attempts to synthesise materially-informed educational research along with arts-based approaches and other forms of explication. Through theorizing with a becoming-atmosphere the thesis strives to become atmospheric and generative through expressing its own agency, as it is repeatedly co-produced.

In drawing on new materialisms as part of the research, criticism and questions related to the positioning of posthumanism within post-theories and indeed to humanism become relevant. I find myself here not because I reject poststructuralism, but I searched for a more critical theory that did not privilege language in the same way. Nor do I rest on a model of posthumanism that explores the way that technology operates. Rather I lean towards new materialist, feminist approaches that locate the human, alongside all that is non-human in an attempt to seek something new. It therefore does not ignore humanism or postmodernism, but see these as a relevant part of its roots and heritage. Callus and Herbrechter (2012: 243) propose that posthumanism offers something positive towards theoretical debate, seeing it as '*replenishment* compensating for poststructuralisms' theoretical 'exhaustion.'" For me, one way that this is achieved

is through the  
creative  
approaches to  
research as well  
as the ways that  
posthumanism  
spans from field to  
field. At the  
moment it is the  
best position for  
me and opens up  
huge possibilities  
and an openness  
to 'Othering'.

Cut outs

However, I do wish to have some empowering impact from my academic work but I want to avoid scripting the answers for the reader. Over the years I have become suspicious of people who usually call themselves 'consultants'; that advise schools on how to function and what is important. Underneath these simple messages that schools receive and lap up, are usually more complex drivers which are often financially and politically motivated. I wish to maintain 'teachers' as true professionals who are able to make decisions about their own professional identity and how their schools and pupils are able to thrive. One of the moral purposes of my thesis is to get existing and trainee teachers to have a period of reflection as they view the film or themes that are raised. I want them to be able to think about the messages that they read from this and debate with colleagues about possible meanings. My emancipatory hopes are that some of these teachers will (re)consider the taken-for-granted aspects of school life and what values and beliefs may be important for them and others. And maybe some change will happen as a result of that; a real impact of this research, but one that is personal to the individual. Not a model of 'I' as 'expert-researcher' telling one what to do, rather 'I' as 'issue-raiser'. Whilst it may scare some researchers, I want my thesis to take on a life of its own – further blurring the subject-object dichotomy – and to be read and re-read in different ways by different people. Like the works of art that are infiltrating my writing, the subjectivity of my work is important to me.

Barad adds the notion  
of 'diffraction' which is  
useful here in relation  
to Deleuze's senses of  
differences and  
repetition. She  
suggests that rather  
than reflecting over  
something repeatedly  
there is a need for re-  
turning – looking over it  
again and again – in  
her words to 'iteratively

Cut outs

intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetime-matterings)' (Barad, 2014: 168). This is a distinction between 'reflecting-returning' and 'diffracting-re-turning' as different sets of intra-actions. What appears powerful is that diffraction itself troubles dichotomies, such as the traditional binaries of subject/object, animate/inanimate. Diffraction offers something more lively that helps us think to more carefully about boundaries. This thesis incorporates such diffraction as it attempts to re-tune us towards atmospheres within a school context.

A key aspect of this thinking with the dichotomy is that the intra-actions enact 'agential cuts,' which rather than separate out, cause a cutting together-apart. As such there is a 'iterative (re)configuring of patterns of differentiating-entangling' (Barad, 2014: 168) going on to suggest that 'matter itself is diffracted, dispersed, threaded through with materializing and sedimented effects of iterative reconfigurings of spacetime-mattering, traces of what might yet (have) happen(ed).' This is alluded to within the subheading of the thesis and the way that I attempt to play with matter(s) as part of this adventure and movement alongside atmospheres. As such there is the queering of the binaries and breaking down of notions of identity and difference. The movement is towards deeper level meaning-mattering (differentiating-entangling) to recursively break down any sense of atmosphere and to then repeatedly cut it together apart again. This is a dynamic movement which allows materiality to be infused with an atmosphere and that which returns may serve to interrupt or surprise. In Barad's words (2014: 178)

'That which is  
determinate (eg.  
intelligence) is  
materially  
haunted by –  
infused with –  
that which is  
constitutively  
excluded  
(remains  
indeterminate,  
eg.

Cut outs

unintelligible)....In/determinacy is an always already opening up-to-come.  
In/determinacy is the surprise, the interruption, by the stranger (within) re-  
turning unannounced'. I will return to thinking with Barad later in the thesis.

## Reaching a

### Plateau

#### Chapter 7: Cobain

Cobain noticed The

Wisp from her

Totemical on

another night when

sleep was evading

her. It is only the

second time that

she had ever seen

The Wisp as it was

unusual for him to venture close to the villages. His light was translucent and the glow lights up the immediate area. His trailing wisps leaving strange patterns in the sky, momentarily frozen before quickly fading away. As he disappeared through the trees her gaze landed on River, his chest slowly rising and falling, with his mane sticking out in several directions. The bond between them is so great. Cobain had also strived to express her individuality and so far this had gone unnoticed by her farmer, Glacial. The under hairs on her mane were dyed a bright blue, but masked by the dark brown hair that grows over it. She wasn't sure what would happen when this was eventually discovered, probably some menial punishment. But it was important to her to be herself. Three years to go until graduation and Cobain was already striving escape and dreaming of joining her Elders.

Cut outs

**Still taken from Research Film**



She had nothing  
against Glacial.

The fact that  
their group were  
tethered to the  
totemicals

hadn't bothered  
her. She had

always been  
able to release

the locking

Cut outs

mechanism anyway, only to return to 'her place' when the sun began to rise. Her own mini-rebellion and escape. And Glacial was surely one of the most competitive Teverniers that the island had seen for some time. The word 'obsession' was never quite enough to describe Glacial's desire towards creating the finest, most beautiful totemical on the island. Despite her quiet rebellion and minor acts of resistance, Cobain actually liked and admired Glacial. She often wanted to please her and keep her happy. It **always felt like her own experiences in the village were different to the ones intended [by Glacial]**<sup>3</sup>. A misplaced sense of what was right. She was finally beginning to understand how Elly, the other local Tevernier, would question '**how much... we really 'see' or experience?**<sup>4</sup>' It was only recently that Cobain had started to put things together and had started to question the quest for beauty. Some distance from the pack was allowing her to think in different ways and giving her new perspectives. As she finally drifted off to a shallow sleep, she wondered if her sighting of The Wisp was a reminder about her resistance. Maybe it was time to act upon it.

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<sup>3</sup> Quote from '~~Guest~~/Guessed Book'. Teacher

<sup>4</sup> Quote from '~~Guest~~/Guessed Book'. Teacher



## Logic of

### Atmospheres and Atmosphering

Earlier during the writing phase of the thesis I knew that I wanted to present my research in different ways. This led to a wide range of readings, most of which I experienced and then parked. One particular book stood out but I was uncertain how this might be relevant and it was several years later when I understood how this may function within this thesis. This book is 'Tree of codes' by Jonathan Safran Foer (2010). Foer had created an artwork in the form of a book, or indeed a *becoming*-book. He takes the original text of 'Street of Crocodiles' by Bruno Schultz, and carves out windows, thereby erasing words to produce something else.

Street of Crocodiles

Street of Crocodiles

Tree of Codes

Reading this book was an experience in itself as it is housed in the 'special collections' section of the university library. This involved getting buzzed into a separate part of the building and being led through a range of valuable and unusual books until the 'tree of codes' was presented to me on a reading table. The book felt precious, and required a delicate touch and white gloves to protect it. It was a wholly sensory experience.

With the  
requirement to  
submit the thesis  
electronically it is  
impossible to give  
the full flavour of  
the whole piece. It  
is my desire for  
the thesis to be  
experienced, with  
the reader able to  
physically turn the  
page. Its very

Cut outs

materiality is extremely important. I have started to play with the cut out windows already in the writing, creating frames for some of the images. Here I would like to use the cut outs in a similar way to Foer, although rather than editing out words the cut outs will intersperse the text. This will add to the reading of this section and may cause the reader to have similar experiences than when I originally read some of tree of codes. That is that the cutouts will serve as another method within the thesis of causing a disruption and jolt. I have named this section 'Active Slashes' to echo this purposeful editing and to play with the title of the thesis:

Affective School Atmospheres

Affective School Atmospheres

Active Slashes

## Active Slashes

Deleuze's 'Logic of Sense' (2004) has given a useful reading in helping me to think through how affective school atmospheres may be conceptualised here.

This fits well with my philosophical paradigm in thinking this through with new

materialism, and Deleuze's writing has clearly made a significant contribution to this thesis. Whilst much of logic of sense seems to address issues of language, and particularly theorising with Lewis Carroll's 'Alice in Wonderland', I want to be explicit in stating that this is not a turn to post-structuralism. Whilst I will speak of words and their usage I continue to assert that it is ALL that matters, not just language.

Of interest is Deleuze's idea of the double meaning and simultaneous dimensions of words and concepts. An experience of looking into a mirror but seeing a different reflection. Deleuze relates this to the colour 'green'

and in thinking about  
 logical attributes  
 states that 'the  
 attribute is not a  
 being and does not  
 qualify a being; it is  
 an extra-being.  
 "Green" designates  
 a quality, a mixture  
 of things, a mixture  
 of tree and air,  
 where chlorophyll  
 coexists with all the parts of a leaf. "To green", on the contrary, is not a  
 quality in the thing, but an attribute which is said of the thing'. Extrapolating this  
 to my research context we may consider that an atmosphered space is just an  
 attribute. In other words the label and word is never enough to  
 describe it. The designate 'atmosphere' could then be simply a being or  
 extra-being. From the posthuman perspective, rather than something  
 that we attach to a physical space, an ethereal mood, atmosphere could be  
 conceived as important matter in its own right. Matter that is therefore  
 event-ful. Deleuze considers such a concept *aliquid* and shifts philosophical  
 thinking further. This leads to questioning the position of statements like 'this  
 place has an atmosphere' and 'this atmosphere has a place', since it  
 continues to exist in different dimensions. In logic of sense (Deleuze,  
 2004) there is discussion around faultlines, frontiers and the thin lines between  
 dimensions. This is exemplified through Carroll's 'smile without a cat',  
 which leads me to the Deleuzian notion of 'bodies without organs'.  
 Atmospheres, like the smile, may then exist in other dimensions, leaking  
 through the boundaries between spaces.

The positioning of things against one another is also explored by Deleuze,  
 who suggests that the relational impact of matter is important. An  
 example of the empty shelf, contrasting just how crowded the  
 neighbouring shelf actually is, but only through this comparison. Without this  
 presence we lack the significance of comparison. I also

like the way that  
Deleuze uses the  
words Phantom and  
Phantasm in relative  
ways. Whilst the  
'phantom' or 'ghost'  
is given materiality,  
'phantasm' becomes  
more encompassing  
and connotes the  
apparition and the  
affective or ghost-like  
experience of encounter. The materiality of an 'affective atmosphere' is difficult  
to discuss as it doesn't appear to have materiality in a bounded form.  
There is no 'ghost' to go with the 'haunting'. The atmosphere seems  
more loaded towards the 'haunting' aspects of the event and there is little that  
we can use in comparison. There is nothing that we can use in  
relative terms in a similar way to the empty shelf. Indeed, I suggest that  
atmosphere is not something that begins nor ends, and is always present  
and everywhere. The supposition here is therefore that there is nowhere that  
isn't atmosphered.

In logic of sense, Deleuze spends time exploring word meanings in a structural  
sense and it is worth thinking with this momentarily. There is a debate about  
how the word 'sense' and 'nonsense' function against and with each  
other. However, Deleuze is resisting the binary dualism and questions why we  
would wish to view sense and nonsense, in a similar relationship as true and  
false. He asks, 'what would be the purpose of rising from the domain of truth to  
the domain of sense, if it were only to find between sense and nonsense a  
relation analogous to that of true and the false?' (2004: 70) Relating in  
atmosphere, for the most part the word has been used in this thesis as a  
condition, and been viewed as a dynamic set of ecstasies, affect and an  
intensity. What Deleuze brings to mind is what would be the opposite or  
negative to the atmosphere. As discussed, it seems that the word does not  
come with an opposite – there is no way to position it relationally. Day is  
signified by its relationship to night. Maybe it is necessary to  
think how atmosphere could be signified. Would there be a space that had a 93

dis-atmosphere or  
un-atmosphere?  
When a room is  
emptied and is  
matter-less maybe  
it has been  
dis-atmosphered, to  
show the significant  
shift in the  
environment. The  
answer here may be  
found among the  
sense of atmosphere



as event. A different set of laws are needed  
**Berndnaut Smilde (2015) Nimbus**  
around the event, which instead can be seen as devoid of signification.  
Atmosphere may be considered more neutrally, its singularity recognized  
as just variations of its intensity, and implying that the atmosphere is never not  
there. There is no dis-atmosphere. Rather the atmosphere is always  
becoming, and immanent within the becoming we find it changing,  
shifting and reforming.

It is real and lived. Linking into the use of artwork throughout the  
thesis the atmosphere is not like Constable's study of clouds. An  
approach that attempts to improve technique and colour, until there can be a  
representation of those clouds. Constable's clouds are fabulous works of art but  
there is something too static about them as they become rendered  
in oils. Rather the work of an artist like Berndnaut Smilde attempts something  
different with clouds. He produces internal sculptures of clouds, called  
Nimbuses, which are momentary, lasting for around 10 seconds. The artwork is  
instead captured with photography. Within these sculpture is the dynamism and  
intensities that are warranted around a discussion around atmospheres. Smilde  
create the conditions, but isn't able to predict exactly how they will  
look or the impact they will have. Like the atmosphere his art resists being  
produced and contrived. Immanent within both is the agentic  
capacities that I believe make them exciting and interesting. Since  
the clouds exist momentarily there is an intensity to the photography of the  
Nimbuses, as the moment is event-ful and then gone.



Therefore returning again to language, I wonder if the space can ever be atmosphered. That is, a verb to describe the process of creating an atmosphere. Within the literature there is research to look at how atmospheres could be produced (eg. Edensor, 2012) but I remain skeptical. I believe that nothing can be atmosphered and what these authors are describing is the act of atmosphering. The atmosphering is the process of beginning to create a set of conditions, using non-human matter to have an impact on the human. Using the lens of new materialism leads me to see this as hugely problematic and an example of anthropocentrism. The atmosphere instead should be viewed as part of a much larger assemblage.

Within the narrative writing of 'Reaching a Plateau', the notion of 'Sundara' functions in a metaphorical way as approximating a term such as 'atmosphere'. Sundara is conceptualized based on its translation into the word 'beauty'. The characters are obsessed with the search for beauty and having the most beautiful totemical sculpture. The morality within the text leads to the point where this quest has proved futile, and the important aspects of 'life', such as the natural environment and relationships, were already infused with beauty. The characters had been turned the other way and hadn't noticed what they already had. Placing such ideas within a school context and reading them alongside affective atmospheres, is interesting. It may be possible that schools are looking the wrong way in their search for the 'best school' with 'high results'. Their attitude towards school ethos as static and clichéd, should turn towards messy concepts such as school atmosphere, as part of an everyday tuning into the vitality and ecstasy of the everyday affective environment. Perhaps then we will only begin to understand what we already have within the institution of the school.

Returning to the notions of repetition, Deleuze makes a distinction between conscious and unconscious repetition. He suggests that seeing life as a series of repetitions is illusory since it turns us away from the real source of the intensity in our lives...from 'the creative experimentation with simulacra or as individuals caught in a process of change' (Williams, 2003; 35). There is a sense that through

operating our lives according to the repetition of routine (Get up, toilet, shower, clean teeth...) we adopt a moral code but at the same time we become subjected to actions of boredom and despair. The point is that the repeated act is not entered into consciously, but instead becomes habitual. Deleuze's argument becomes that a habitual repetition is never the repetition of the same. Habit is therefore not something to generalize, but is either that an action has to change in order to allow it to acquire habit, or that the action remains the same yet the context changes. This suggestion therefore argues against the school habits being able to contribute to the repetition of an atmosphere. To put this another way, the atmosphere in a school context is not able to become actual through moral repetitions since it is always a set of pure differences.

Deleuze relates habit to the synthesis of time where the past becomes synthesised. The habit has a directionality about it, moving from the past to the present. Deleuze posits that 'passive synthesis or contraction is essentially symmetrical: it goes from the past to the future in the present, thus, from the particular to the general, thereby imparting direction to the arrow of time (1994: 71, 97). Williams illustrates this brilliantly by describing our relationship with negotiating your stairs at home. 'When we repeat an act in the past (ascending a flight of stairs), the series of repetitions becomes synthesised in the present (Even drunk and in the dark, we are a record of the prior repetitions) as a forward looking movement (that records allows us to stand in a relation of expectancy to the future – until a child's toy undoes all the good work of repetition)' (Williams, 2003: 87). In the other research that I have already referenced in relation to atmospheres, it is perhaps the habitual aspects of the atmosphere that they refer. This is one that some may consider subject to coding and is a tangible, representable atmosphere. But my argument remains that it is the unconscious aspects of atmosphere, the expectancy to the future (the child's toy), that always disrupts. The atmosphere continues to have an agency in resisting becoming fixed.

A further aspect of this is that the passive synthesis becomes a sense, an umbrella thrown over many different sensations. For example, a chair is always more than the actual chair. A chair is experienced in a multi-sensory way, having a sight, touch, smell, sound (the chair is green, comfy, smells like old leather and

squeaks when I move around on it). The chair is always virtual and these aspects combine to give an overall sensation of what the chair is. Atmosphere can be shown in a similar way, understanding it as a set of sensations. When labelling an atmosphere as 'friendly', it is always only one small sensation that makes up the atmosphere. There is a passive synthesis of this atmosphere, but this is further complicated as each synthesis varies according to who/what is perceiving it. As such the atmosphere never has a fixed identity but must be thought as a synthesis of various sensations.

# Reaching a Plateau

## Chapter 8: Loving Learning

Elly woke up at the usual time. Just as the sun was beginning to creep under her door. The feeling was there again, only stronger this time. Elly was born into a farming family and it was something she had done all her life – almost the past 30 years. She loved and respected the young Coosur and it was always her mission to keep them educated and occupied. She understood how rigid the farming system was becoming and yet she had hung onto her principles and her desire to have them in a setting **where they can grow, learn and enjoy learning**<sup>5</sup>. Beauty was important to her, but it was the holistic aspects of the farm that was also crucial. These Coosur were like her children and she only wanted the best for them.

It was sadness that again overwhelmed her. Her Coosur still seemed content but she couldn't ignore the negative feelings all around the island. Something was changing around the farms and it was far from beautiful. The new gates, motivational posters, regimented meal times, and constant rules were changing things. The limits and restrictions placed everyday into the environment around her was certainly affecting her mood. If it was doing this to her, how was it affecting others?

As she pondered these things, Elly realized that she hasn't played her guitar for several weeks. This had been her favourite past time as she sat on her stoop and sang quietly to herself. The Coosur would often move closer to the hut, their ears flicking around in different directions, capturing the sweet sounds of the music. Elly vowed that tonight she would be taking her guitar out in the evening. She was going to make some changes starting with this promise to herself.

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<sup>5</sup> Quote from 'Guest/Guessed Book' after viewing the draft film. Student Teacher

## Chapter 9: Escape

‘Psst. I’m sick of **feeling trapped**’<sup>6</sup> hissed River in between mouthfuls of wood.

‘I don’t feel trapped,’ whispered Cobain in reply, ‘its more. Well, it just that I want to be able to be myself more. There are so many rules and it just doesn’t somehow feel right any more’.

It was at this moment that they decided on the plot. To leave the farm.

‘Remember the story of the ‘trapped hunters’?’ asked River, eyes widening.

Cobain nodded but it was a timid one. She knew what was coming next and couldn’t help but feel gripped with fear. Her hind muscles tensed and twitched. He had articulated what she was thinking but was too afraid to say.



Still taken from Research Film

‘Let’s go to the Upper Lands. Tomorrow night we can set off, once the others are asleep’ suggested River.

Cobain immediately agreed on this plan, yet it was a different motivation for her. She had always wanted to know more of the island. That feeling of exploration and excitement was something that has always pulled her. She wanted to find the fabled ‘perfect tree’ and to carve the finest totemical. If she could give this gift to

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<sup>6</sup> Quote from ‘Guest/Guessed Book’ after viewing the draft film. Student Teacher

the Teveners then maybe her freedom could come. This journey wasn't motivated by just escape and rebellion, like River, but something else. It spoke of her own personal need to be herself and to do her best.

It was this comforting thought that she hoped would bring a peaceful nights sleep that evening. She snuggled into the thick fur of River and closed her eyes. The nervous butterfly, at the pit of her stomach, told her that things were about to change.



## Critical Ethnography

In this chapter I give a summary of the ethnographic approaches used as part of the thesis. At the beginning of the research project the methodological approach of new materialisms had not been fully conceptualised by the author. The early research was driven by research methods with ethnographic approaches emerging to better understand affective atmospheres within a school setting.

In terms of new materialisms there is a temptation to reject analytical research methods, including ethnography. However, Schadler (2017) suggests that the approaches of new materialisms might work productively with ethnographic approaches through a refiguring of the tools of ethnography, which does not have to be associated with epistemologies of positivism and representation. Rather, new materialisms approach ethnography through singularities so that new materialist theories become part of the research assemblage themselves. This is also true for this thesis in that the methodology and paradigms aligned along only one plane. There is an entanglement of methodological tools created within other theoretical frameworks that moves towards trans-disciplinary research discussed elsewhere in the thesis chapter entitled 'Core Contributions' (p.158). The bounding of ethnography as a distinct approach incorporating certain research methods is blurred. Therefore, whilst some view ethnography as part of the method, others would consider it to be more like a concept. The conceptual aspect of ethnography is most pertinent in relation to this research and allows a move towards what I call a critical ethnography.

This critical ethnography within new materialisms 'is not concerned with interpretation or reconstruction, instead it *references* possible 'sedimented histories' (Barad) and *rebuilds worlds* that inhabit a research object' (Schadler, 2017: 14). It is not a question of 'what was happening here?' since this has past and is sedimented, to become 'how do we notice the movement of the current atmosphere-world?' This is a subtle but important distinction for the ethnographic positioning the author moved through as part of this research project. The 'world' in this context is that of the school and ethnography is an obvious choice for attempting to better understand the life of the school. By adding this critical stance, it becomes ethnography with a little 'e', one that in some ways is emancipated

from the traditions associated with ethnographic methods, such as observation and interview.

This research project avoids representing the school but attempts to gain some insight into it. The researcher is trying to get at the life and atmosphere of the school through the objects and affects that it is entangled with. This stance is of importance because it is from this position that most of the work is unfolded. Using film and sensory approaches means that the researcher can attune with the more-than human. This is the ontological position of the thesis, to look beyond the human. This method allowed me to generate knowledge and texts in a different way, by folding the data around the 'world' of schools and supporting teachers to think with it.

It allows the ethereal atmosphere to somehow come into focus in a way that traditional ethnography might not be able to do. Carrying out observations, for example, might not be in the spirit of the methodological approach taken in the thesis, since it would give not insight into the 'more-than'. The atmosphere would not be seen. These methods contain limitations, but the experiment has always been to somehow get closer to this 'affective school atmosphere.' Rather than attempting to 'rebuild worlds' within the thesis, I would suggest there is a (re)becoming of worlds. By this I acknowledge the non-representational approach and suggest that even when we get close to this world of atmosphere, it has always moved away. There is an emphasis on processes, objects in states of becoming and the exploration of everyday worlds, exemplified well by authors such as Pink (2015) who research everyday lives and practices.

As researcher I am also written into the research since I have convictions and ideas about how school may be affected and affecting. The researcher, to some extent, also becomes a method within the assemblage. I have acknowledged this positioning throughout the project; the ways that there is inseparability between the author, the work, the data and the methodologies. Since atmosphere is always becoming, the research methods are required to also be in movement, to be experimental and always 'becoming'. New materialisms are interested in the 'more-than' and to generate knowledge differently. It avoids turning schools and atmosphere into static and fixed entities. Throughout this work the commitment to a flatter ontology, a monadology, causes a blurring of terminology as is further

evident here. This is part of the methodology and its relationship with ethnography; a complex, experimental entanglement which blurs ideas around concepts and methods.

In this chapter there is an acknowledgment of the developments in ethnographic research over the last century, which has seen constant growth and adaptation. Without these developments, it would be more challenging to present this thesis as legitimate social science research. Whilst they may be discussed as separate ethnographies the commitment to new materialisms, means that the separations should be treated cautiously. Instead these are Deleuzian re-turns of ethnography, 'continuous topological folds of the whole' (de Freitas, 2016: 225). Ethnographic film and sensory ethnography become part of the same fold rather than something separate and distinct. Ethnography continuously troubled me throughout the thesis as it became entangled in the diffractive and intra-active thesis. It repeated itself with multiple names and histories and re-turns.

'...re-turns are products of repetition, of coming back to persistent troublings; they are turnings over. In such re-turnings, there is no singular or unified progressive history or approach to discover. Rather, there is the intensity of multi-dimensional trajectories, as concepts are de- and re-contextualised'

(Hughes and Lury, 2013: 787)

Ethnography is a crucial part of the milieu of this thesis and (critical) ethnography a degree of expression of myself in this research.

## **Ethnographic Film**

Ethnography has a long history and is a well-established research method based on an interpretative study from within the field. Its historical background is from social sciences that emerged at the end of twentieth century as anthropology, the study of humans and their cultures. There was a move away from the 'study-of' to the 'study-with' (Hammersley, 2006). One challenge for ethnography is to move away from seeing phenomena from ones own cultural background and instead to be much more open-minded through immersion in that environment. The researcher becomes participatory in the culture studied and as a result becomes a participant-observer – through watching, observing, interviewing, listening, keeping a diary and much more. Mills and Morton (2013) avoid seeing ethnography as a

specific research method, and instead view it as a way of thinking about social research that incorporates multiple methods under a shared disposition.

### **Reading Books**

**It is good to come and look at books. We all love coming to the library to choose the book we want. Yes, I like reading. I am on sapphire, the highest reading band. [Reading] makes us happy...because you never what what is happening in a book.**

**Sometimes you feel like you are stupid because you can't help not knowing the words. Some people really hate reading bands and they stay on the same one for a while. It gets really annoying for them. They have the read the same books again. Books are boring and nobody really likes books. If they do, they are boring!**

**Student voices – interview data**

Ethnographic film offered an opportunity to work with school pupils to explore the affective school environment. Children used ipads to film within school and I saw the project as giving them space and time to step back and look at the everyday practices taking place in their school and to reflect on how this affected them. I set aside one afternoon a week for a whole term (approximately 11 weeks) where I would be in the school and children would work in small groups outside the classroom with me. We also had an introductory whole class session whereby I sought

pupils verbal consent (after receiving parental written consent) and students began to engage with the concept of an 'atmosphere'.

There are a number of ways that I could have gone about exploring the affective aspects of school atmosphere with the pupils. This may have included the students keeping diaries or creative writing such as poetry or photography. In my attempt to remove any barriers I was concerned about how some pupils may be able to access the written aspects of this and I wanted to make this work as accessible as possible. I worried that some pupils would be de-motivated about taking part in the project if it felt too much like 'work'. Within taught aspects of the EdD I had become interested in visual methodologies and particularly the work of Maclure *et al.* (2010) entitled 'Becoming a Problem', who used video in schools to explore the acquisition of labels given to children in the early years. Film can be a rich source of data and I felt it provided an opportunity to look at 'atmospheres' in a different way. With developments in technology, children today are much more

used to creating and capturing the moving image and I felt that giving the children a video camera would be an accessible way for them to gather data. As well as the students creating film data I intended to also film alongside them so that two streams of film would be captured.

There is a risk that when using film data one is attempting to create a representation of that which is seen. However, this is not the way that I intend to use the film. Ethnography can achieve something more complex than representation by attempting to imply a sense of complexity or a provocation of thought. This is what Tyler (1986) referred to as 'evoking', which aligns well with an attempt to conjure rather than capture an atmosphere. Taking the approaches



of new materialisms offers the author an opportunity to dislodge the single dominant narratives, explore discontinuities and the paradoxes of culture and action (Atkinson and Hammersley, 2003).

**Image from *Nanook of the North* (1922)**

Maclure *et al.* (2010) noted how often film has been used with ethnography but felt that this was done in an empty and banal way. In their short film they produced and edited a piece of work that 'takes the form of an assemblage that deploys montage, cutting, disconnections of sound, vision and script and the jolt of the irrational cut. In particular it tries to mobilize the barely formed, dimly glimpsed sensations that comprise 'affect' in its Deleuzian sense' (Maclure *et al.*, 2010: 1). Use of such techniques have certainly added to the affective nature of the research which is able to 'jolt' the viewer and this is a technique I wanted to use within my work. The affect of the film not only mirrors the affective aspects of an atmosphere, but is an important aspect of my whole work.

When the raw film data is collected by the pupils it is my intention to view these and in order to reduce to wealth of data and make the volume manageable I will select certain films that strike a chord or resonate with me. In order to avoid putting my own interpretations into their film data and what it might be 'saying' I will undertake semi-structured interviews with pairs of students as we watch back the clips that they have filmed. Linking back to my methodological stance this is not about seeking a 'true' interpretation or some definite meaning. Instead it is about following an ethical voice and allowing the pupils to feel empowered and listened to. Rather than interpreting their film in my own way, I am seeing a way to think with the children about their choices and what they wanted to communicate, thus avoiding the powerful act of silencing them.

What is critical for me is that it is another opportunity for me to reflect on the project and think more deeply about the positioning and identity of the pupils. It is important to highlight again that it is not about a power play or part of a rational discourse. It is much more fluid than that and acknowledges that a constant slippage occurs, influenced by Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari. Even if we tried to capture the atmosphere or recognize the position that we are at, it has moved on – it is a fleeting moment. Any glimpses occur obliquely, just out of sight.

#### **Bat-like**

**One moment you see it, the next it is gone. Sitting on the sofa with the TV on, the curtains still open as the night draws in. There one is! The bat swoops past the window. The flash of black. Noticed through the corner of the eye. You may dwell on it. Fix your gaze into the dusk and there you see another flick past the window. You point it out to your family – 'a bat'. But the connection is lost, the flicker has paused. Their interest drawn by the television programme prevents the lingering look. But somehow the bats haven't gone. You are tuned in. Another bat. And another – feeding time. One moment you see it, the next it is gone. Fleeting.**

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Incorporating the new materialism aspects into a film is indeed complex, even for my own understanding. Jones *et al.* (2010) noticed how difficult it is to escape from your customary habits of seeing and thinking. As somebody who undertakes many classroom observations as part of my role, this is definitely a risky business for me. Jones *et al.* (2010) have a realization that the data they produce is more of a fiction, a story, than a factual, eyewitness account. This leads them to considering data as a montage, an edited cinematic image.

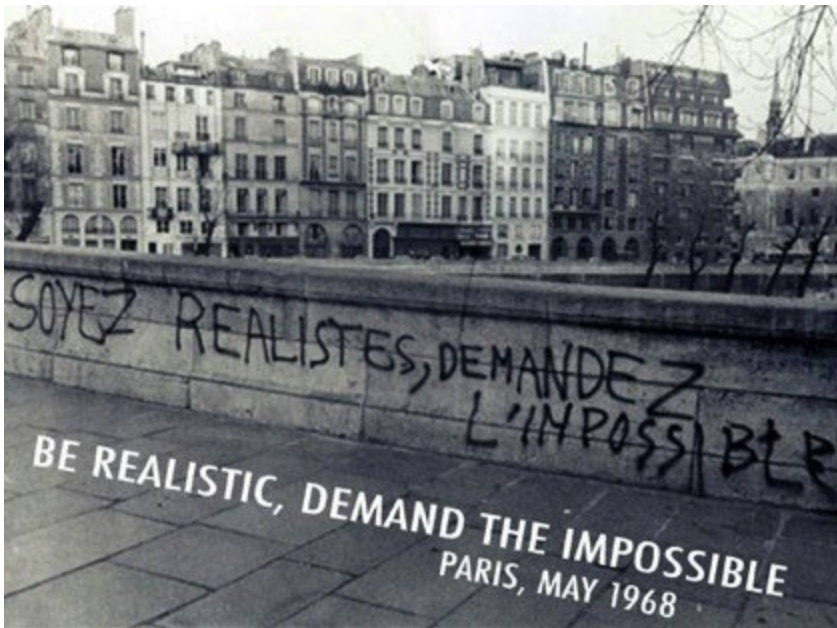


Their experiences cause them to abandon a search to capture accuracy within the school setting. They describe the struggle between themselves as postmodern researchers and the dutiful need to capture clarity and certainty. It draws them to look more closely at the observer and their own subjective past noticing that there is a tendency that 'subjectivity and the object become co-dependent folded into one another' (Bal, 1999: 28). Deleuze's (1986) own work on cinema brings in the concept of the 'out of field' which 'refers to what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present' and I believe this warrants much further scrutiny in relation to my research. As Jones *et al.* (2010) suggest, a classroom cannot simply be observed in an uncomplicated way...it will always speak more of the person observer and it becomes a fiction.

What is increasingly clear to me at this point in the thesis is my struggle to position myself in certain methodological ways, since the discourse of 'thesis writing' continually attempts to pull me towards something else. This is something that is positivistic and has a style of writing that is 'right and proper' for a doctoral piece of work. My desire to produce something-else has to continually assert itself in order to resist this. This is one of the reasons that I have inserted 'data' throughout my writing, inspired particularly by Kristeva (1985) and Lather (1997). These moments are designed to offer the reader another journey through the writing and deliberately avoid the banal. It is a continued attempt to create interesting ways to negotiate the text and remind myself that research can be explored differently.

This draws me into the writing of Koro-Ljungberg and Maclure (2013) and their discussion over what constitutes data. It is argued that positivistic views on data continues to form a grand narrative over research even in times where qualitative research has developed and gained momentum. Indeed the very act of 'doing research' almost forces one to slip into another way – to treat data as uncritical and to recognize 'good' data as trustworthy, valid, meaningful and relevant. But in my work I want to answer their call to 'unthink' data and create something provocative, recognizing data as something more. In my work I conceptualise data in a state of becoming and like Deleuze would focus on *intensities*. I do not consider data to be dead but wish for it to be an act of awe and wonder, seeking to reach deeper for connections and encourage others into pensivity. In line with new materialism positioning I wish my data to have agency of its own, to be active and fluid. As Koro-Ljungberg and Maclure (2013: 222) put it, 'data [is to be] wondered,

eaten, walked, loved, listened to, written, enacted, versed, produced, pictured, charted, drawn and lived...Data is everywhere, nowhere, vanishing, and taking on a strange and unexpected life on its own'.



It is difficult to write about these aspects because I am so entrenched within the process. The image of Massumi's (2002) description of the flight of an arrow springs to mind. This is the idea that the journey of an arrow fired out of the bow can only be

thought about after it has occurred.

'The transition from bow to target is not decomposable into constituent points. A path is not composed of positions. It is non-decomposable: a dynamic unity. That continuity of movement is of another order of reality than the measurable, divisible space it can be confirmed as having crossed. It doesn't stop until it stops: when it hits the target. Then, and only then, is the arrow in position. It is only after the arrow hits its mark that its real trajectory be point-plotted (before, for all we know, the arrow could have taken a different path and missed). The points or positions really appear *retrospectively*, working backwards from the movement's end. It is as if, in our thinking, we put targets all along the path. The inbetween positions are logical targets: possible end points' (Massumi, 2002: 6).

This playing with time also relates directly to the lack of linearity within much of my writing. It is only at this moment of writing that I can look back and see what has really occurred previously. The thesis, like the arrow, can only be conceived when it has reached its target and looked back upon.

In relation to my research, can my writing only really be understood when I have completed it and then revisit that process? How can I capture the constant shifts and turns? Questions that I am unable to answer at present, but ones that I should probably return to later. If the thesis has some kind of core, originality or stability I am not sure where or what that is. Like Barthes' story of the Argo; 'In Ancient Greece a ship known as the Argo was sailed by Jason when searching for the Golden Fleece. Argus, the ship builder travelled on the ship during their voyages and, as they progressed, he replaced and mended any rotten ropes or broken timbers. By the time they returned to Lolkos, the whole ship had been renewed, although it looked the same and went by the same name' (Barthes, 1977: 46). My thesis appears to constantly (re)produce itself as I revisit and refine the text. It is certainly not the same ship that I initially set sail on.

## **Sensory Ethnography**

### *Processes of sensory ethnography*

We are now seeing new genres of ethnography in response to the 'growing complexity, self-reflexivity and communicative intensification of globalized societies' (Mills and Morton, 2013: 94). This discourse of innovation in the field is welcome although the new methodologies are open to criticism, not least through the labelling and perceived division and exclusion. However, my research project may fit within the relatively new field of 'sensory ethnography' which acknowledges that sensoriality is important in how we learn about, understand and represent people's lived experiences, and it is becoming more central to academic practice in the social sciences. This approach fits with the classical approaches of ethnography, sharing many methods of data collection including participant observation, interviewing and collaborative approaches.

Pink (2015) considers sensory ethnography as a much more critical methodology, putting the emphasis on the processes, reflexivity and experiences. In this sense it is then able to play with knowledge and understanding in a different way. Bendix (2000) argued that to research 'sensory perception and reception' requires methods that are able to explore profound types of knowledge – that which is not spoken at all and therefore inaccessible to interview and observation. This means the whole sensorium of being within the world, including that which evades description and is therefore more affective in nature. It is for this reason that within my research I am drawn towards such approaches. The research topic of

‘atmosphere’ itself begs for different ways to be explored and gives an opportunity for experimentation and ‘play’. In keeping with my other methodological stances, Pink (2013) is able to demonstrate how a sensorial approach is complementary:

‘[Ethnography is]...a process of creating and representing knowledge or ways of knowing that are based on ethnographers’ own experiences and the ways these intersect with the persons, places and things encountered during that process. Therefore visual ethnography, as I interpret it, does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers’ experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences, and the negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced’ (Pink (2013: 35)

One aspect of this definition that I particularly like is the way that it considers research in a broader sense rather than privileging the human subjects within any one context. In keeping with posthuman approaches Pink acknowledges the non-human and goes further in suggesting that there is great scope and opportunity to look in wider ways. Critics of such ‘post-modern’ approaches to ethnography, such as Atkinson *et al.* (2007) suggest that the vagueness of ideas devalues systematic approaches to analysis. However, I feel that the experiential and evocative elements are the most productive and in some ways these are more ‘real’ as these can relate to how any one moment is sensed and lived. Within schools much research is carried out in systematic and ordered ways, but it rarely involves the experiences or feelings experienced by those within that setting. Indeed, it rarely looks beyond the human experiences of the school and this must be problematic. The fact that sensory ethnography also occurs in multi-disciplinary fields (such as Anthropology: Strang (2008) Geography: Stevenson (2015); and Education: MacDougall, (2006)) appeals to me, again possibly as part of my personal resistance to a sense of feeling constrained by more conventional educational research.

As I began to engage with the concept of ‘affective atmospheres’ I started to understand the experiences of school and an atmosphere as exceeding the visual.

Indeed much ethnographic research has demonstrated the dominance of the visual and the process of 'thesis production' also creates a pull towards the written. Ingold (2000) recognizes the dominance of the visual and suggested this occurred because instead of asking 'how do we see the environment around us?' there was an assumption that to 'see is to reduce the environment to objects that are to be grasped and appropriated as representations in the mind' (Ingold, 2000: 286). However, many theories understand perception as multisensory – senses are not separated out at the point of perception, rather they are culturally defined. Therefore within this project it would seem false to only consider the visual at the expense of the other senses. Other researchers now are looking at particular senses within research, such as Rice (2005) and Gallagher (2011), who use sound data. Like Pink (2004), who researched within domestic setting, I feel that the school context asks for an approach where no one sensory modality dominates and instead it requires the researcher to be open and have an awareness of all the senses.

### *More than visual*

One might question how the production of a film would allow all these varied senses to be represented, since it appears wholly visual. In answer I would again re-iterate that this project is not one that seeks a solid representation of school or of the human. The film is seeking to evoke. Evoke from the viewer as well as the researchers the atmosphere of the school, should one exist. As I shall later explore, I would suggest that the evocation is able to re-enact all the senses for the viewer, based on their sensory memories and their experiences of childhood. Films inherently appeal to the human sensorium, simultaneously addressing multiple senses with a huge affective purpose. In my case, this is further heightened by my decision to use a film-assemblage approach by cutting in other short film clips in order to encourage the viewer to 'see' in multiple or other ways. At times the clips may compliment the primary data and at other times they may jar. In a Deleuzian sense these then act as series of lines and cuts, which seek to open up the film text. In his words 'some lines are segments, or segmented; some lines get caught in a rut, or disappear into "black holes"; some are destructive, sketching death; and some lines are vital and creative. These creative and vital lines open up an assemblage' (Deleuze, 2006: 178)

Such film editing techniques are acknowledged by different authors as producing 'jerks or spasms' or 'psycho-physiological' effects (Williams, 1991; Eisenstein, 1957). Rather than seeing these as manipulative approaches towards the audience, I consider them a way to concentrate the film and add texture to the experience. Furthermore, some of the film data collected is ripe for a multisensory consideration, such as the clips that take place within the school dining room. Many of us will have memories of school cafeterias that include the visual, auditory, olfactory and indeed the gustatory!



**Still photograph  
taken from film 'Still  
Life', by Sam  
Taylor-Wood (2001)**

### *Childhood*

MacDougall (2006) has written extensively about how film can be used in ethnography. He is one of few authors who recognize the use of ethnography in a school setting, although he suggests that children are often framed in particular ways. Often children are stereotyped to be unnoticed or unimportant and documentary makers have often framed the child as 'vulnerable'.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century art, particularly in literature and film, childhood is often represented as an unequivocally happy time. Innocence and freedom are evoked to describe growing up in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Yet we must wonder how stereotyped these images become, since childhood can be reconstructed in our minds to edit out negative aspects. This important point links back to the argument about representation where Vaughan (1999: 21) suggests that a 'film is about something' whereas 'reality is not'. Within a school setting therefore it isn't possible to 'capture it'. I am unable to simplify the 'school' as an affective place and wish to take the risk within the film-making. As MacDougall (2006: 6) puts it:



‘In film the complexity of people and objects implicitly resists the theories and explanations in which the film enlists them, sometimes suggesting other explanations or no explanations at all. In this sense, then, film, is always a discourse of risk and indeterminacy. This puts it at odds with most academic writing, which, despite its cautions and qualifications, is a discourse that advances towards conclusion’

One risk for myself during the data is that I did not know what the children would actually film and how they would interpret the notion of ‘atmosphere’. This unknown was both exciting and scary at the same time.

MacDougall (2006) produced an ethnographic film based at the Doon school in India and describes his experiences of this. In similar ways to ‘atmosphere’ he started off in abstract ways to explore the character of the school and the social aesthetics. By this he meant ‘aesthetics [having] little to do with notions of beauty or art, but rather with a much wider range of culturally patterned sensory experiences’ (MacDougall, 2006: 98). He saw the aesthetics as worthy of study in its own right as it produced knowledge in certain and different ways. There was a recognition that the social aesthetics wasn’t a central theme or focus that could be studied, but instead formed the backdrop and product of everyday life which could only be ‘approached obliquely, through the events and material objects in which it played a variety of roles. These events may be small and incidental, or ordinary, or large and extraordinary’ (MacDougall, 2006: 108).

If ethnographic experiences are to be considered ‘embodied’ this involves learning and knowing through ones whole experiencing body, including both body and mind. By involving the students directly within the project it was moving towards a greater sense of embodiment or acknowledging how complex this actually is. However, there is a shift towards ‘emplacement’ which instead suggests the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment (Howes, 2005: 7). Pink (2015: 28) takes this further to argue an ‘emplaced ethnography that attends to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds, and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment’.

Whilst such a framing of pupils within an emplaced ethnography is noble, there is the continued problem that the research and indeed the film will speak more of ‘I’. I



wonder how much my 'framing' as expert within this context (from the child participants perspective) has influenced the things that they have captured. How much data is really about 'how school feels' and how much is about 'what I think I am meant to film and feel within school?' I have asked children to attempt to look at their schools in a different way, but I question if I have underestimated the complexity of this. MacDougall (2006: 7) suggests that to 'look carefully requires strength, calmness and affection. The affection cannot be in the abstract, it must be an affection of the senses'. I now believe that giving more training to the pupils in the use of film and how to notice things would have been beneficial, in terms of allowing them to notice differently. The easy availability of film media to students via mobile phones has allowed filming to be accessible and straightforward. However, I wonder if this has detracted from the actual process of film making.

### **Loss**

**Absence. Loss. No longer there where he should be. The routines rupture. Our cat noticed. But now no longer noticeable. Seventeen years of loyalty leaving sadness. The needs of our upset children force us on.**

**He was always her cat really. A symbol of new life and independence. But pain doesn't discriminate. The missing bowls. No need to shut the door. The morning hellos and the supper time food.**

**Buried. Deep. My experiences unspoken. The unearthly perception of the neighbours cat. Every day sitting by the soil mound. How long will this last?**

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### ***Experience***

When people watch the research film their school histories and experiences will have a major impact upon their reading of the text. This is in stark contrast to some of the other research that I have seen that explore atmosphere, since these are in contexts that are unfamiliar to me and presumably many others, being specific to certain locations (eg. Billingsgate Fish Market - Lyon, 2015; Margate – Jackson, 2015; and a Pop-up food market in London – Concha, 2015). In terms of the productive impact of the film I am curious to find out if this is limiting the ways that the viewer might wish to re-conceptualise what school may be about. In other

words, if the viewer had experienced a positive and rewarding time at school, are they more likely to dismiss the film or indeed argue that school should be more like

that which they originally experienced? The past experiences of the subject are inherently a part of their reading of the film.

Perception continues to assert itself into my thesis with Howes (2003: 40) suggesting that 'perception' is central to 'good ethnography'. Yet the term itself is contentious and is debated. The philosophy of Merleau-Ponty returns here as he placed sensation at the centre of human perception. Without sensation he argued that there would be no feeling at all. He suggests that 'to feel is to come up against qualities' that is, sensations are produced through our encounters with 'sense-data' or the qualities that are the properties of the objects (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 4). This work has been influential among social and visual anthropologists interested in the body and the senses. MacDougall (1998) and Ingold (2000) have built upon this philosophy to suggest that the senses are involved in a complex synergy and they share an experiential field. Gibson's theory of perception suggests a constant state processes around the sensorium and is further developed by Ingold to suggest that 'perception...is not the achievement of a mind in a body, but of the organism as whole in its environment, and is tantamount to the organism's own exploratory movement through the world'. This, he goes on to suggest makes 'mind' 'immanent in the network of sensory pathways that are set up by virtue of the perceiver's immersion in his or her environment' (Ingold, 2000: 3). Perception is therefore construed as holistic and this viewpoint helps to justify my move from 'visual' to a more encompassing and critical 'sensory ethnography'. This raises interesting questions about how the mind might interact with affect, if affect is considered as a sub-conscious phenomenon. It suggests that the mind, and therefore the human mind, is needed for the atmosphere to be perceived. Yet I would argue that the atmosphere is there regardless of any perception by the human mind. The atmosphere is immanent and as stated elsewhere, exists for itself.

### *Place*

Returning to issues of place, a focus on space and place allows us to consider aspects of temporality within ethnographic research. Pink (2015) suggests that this connects us with a future-orientated approach in research design and this allows up to open ethnographic practice to 'applied and change making agendas' (Pink, 2015: 33). We can acknowledge school as a discrete place, often being fixed with its own boundaries and borders. However, these can become blurred at times.

These could be thought of as the flows that link it to other locations, persons and things, extending beyond the school gates. Overall, many would acknowledge school as a social construction with its roots in Victorian notions of learning and education (eg. Ball, 1990). Whilst the current education system in the UK can be viewed historically and in many ways appears at first glance unchanged, in fact it is never fixed. Politics and power continue to have their place in the construction of schooling and global agendas, such as neoliberalism are also prevalent. This is relevant within the project since it can be suggested that the school atmosphere is entangled with the politics and policy and is always implicated with it. A good example of this may be the atmosphere in a school the day before they receive an Ofsted inspection, which is palpably there. The emplaced ethnography must attend to these details in the everyday embodiment and sensory engagement of this unique environment.

Ingold's influence returns here as he refigures place so it transcends only 'the environment' and becomes what he terms an 'entanglement' (2008: 1797). He proposes that movement is of more importance than place, going on to argue that places are produced from movement because 'there would be no places were it not for the comings and goings of human beings and other organisms to and from them, from and to places elsewhere' (Ingold, 2008: 1808). Whilst a school environment tends to be located in one particular place, this viewpoint immediately brings to mind the daily commute to and from school, in a perpetual patterns for five days of the week. There is an implication that without the movement of children to the school each day, that place, that school, would not exist and at this superficial level this would seem to be correct. Ingold also argues that places don't exist and instead they 'occur', happening along the lifepaths of beings. Following this we are always emplaced because we are always in a state of movement.

Pink (2015: 37) suggests that 'if we see places as 'occurring' through the intersections and proximity of pathways as they are entangled then they are events that are constituted neither internally nor externally but as varying intensities in what Ingold (2008) calls a 'meshwork'. I like the complexity that this evokes within the place of school and the use of an 'event' highlights to me the

temporality of place. Schools are constantly changing and the use of sensory ethnography is about thinking at that moment about the flux, the intensities of the atmosphere, the changes of the place, and everything that occurs past that moment is merely reflexivity. In fact to some extent it suggests that the particular school used in the research is almost irrelevant since it no longer exists in the same way that it did during the data collection. That school is no more.

The final point linked to place, comes from Pink's (2015) suggestion of 'ethnographic places' as a response to the conceptualization of place as an 'entanglement of persons, things, trajectories, sensations, discourses and more'

### **Bluebells**

**I go for a run through woodland. This isn't my normal route. The weather is sunny and warm. At first I concentrate on the running – being able to ascent the steeper hills whilst being able to breathe at the same time. This isn't easy.**

**Then I am struck by beauty. In this deserted woodland I run through carpets of bluebells in full bloom. This sight catches my breath more than the running. But it continues, the whole woodland covered in bluebells. The sunlight shines through the leaves creating dappled patterns on the ground. I'm alone. There is nobody to share this scene with, no camera, so I try to drink in the intensities. All thoughts of the difficulties of running are subsumed by the visual stimuli.**

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(2015: 48). The ethnographic place isn't the actual place where the ethnographer has participated in and gathered data. Instead it is another place that we make when we as ethnographers communicate and think about that place. In whatever medium it is represented its material and sensory presence is difficult to comprehend as its 'meanings are constituted in relation to readers and audiences through their participation.' As the viewer watched the film produced they may imagine themselves in a place that they can no longer go back to. It invites the audience to acknowledge and consider their own trajectories and pathways and how the influence of the film will engage with them. More so than a written text, the

film must be considered as more 'open to other places and to space in that their meaning will always be contingent on what is going on around them, that is, in relation to new findings, politics, theories, approaches and audiences, as they move on temporally and in the imaginations of the viewers' (Pink, 2015: 49).

### *Arts-based approaches*

Within texts on visual methodologies we go full circle to return to issues around representation and post-humanism. Rose (2012) argues that the growth of visual methodologies supported a move to thinking about being human in different ways with Hayles (2006: 165) suggesting that we are becoming 'post-human' because of the increasingly intense flows of information occurring now between humans, animals and machines. These 'flows' are seen as a 'co-evolving and densely interconnected complex system'. This terminology instantly brings to mind a Deleuzian approach and ties in with the concept of 'becoming'. Ambrose (2007: 188) suggests that this 'creative ontology...goes beyond mere surface fixities associated with the "actual" (for example the existing conditions of current culture and society) in the effort to assemble a conceptual discourse capable of conveying pre-individual impersonal forces, energies, fluxes, flows and sensations that actual socio-historical situations occlude, reify and domesticate into rational orders, conceptual systems and clichéd patterns of representation and intelligibility'. Thus the 'affective' aspects of visual research can be drawn upon, as opposed to



looking at purely phenomenological approaches. Marks (2002) picks up the argument about pursuing a post-human project as she searched for a shared physical presence rather than any symbolic meaning. She aims to find the richness and vitality in the images rather than interpret it's meaning; as there is 'no need to interpret, only unfold, to increase the surface area of experience (Marks, 2002: x) This fits well with the stated aims of my visual media produced from the research.

### **Pile of shoes; Holocaust Debris. © Peter Wilson (Flickr)**

Jagodzinski and Wallin's (2013) writing on arts-based research, notes the posthuman lines charted by Delueze and Guattari (1987), and are these are clearly pertinent to this project. They recognize how existing posthuman arts research failed in being radical enough and what is instead required is an approach that avoids focusing on the art *object* and instead regards it as an *event*.

This then seeks a move away from the impasse of Deleuze's 'image of thought' which effectively stops people from thinking. There is a strong call for something that causes new thought, which perhaps in violent ways, causes the *possible* to emerge from the conceptualization of the art. As Deleuze purports 'thought is nothing without something that forces and does violence to it' (Deleuze, 2000: 96). Within the context of educational research there is a need to breakdown common sense and banality, in order to betray these 'territories' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). In producing non-representational forces of art we become particularly tuned into the processes and it focuses instead on potentialities and becoming-art. Perhaps this is one brief position that the research film finds itself in. As in my other writing earlier with regard to ethnographic arts research, it is at this juncture that I find a rich and complex concoction that opens up the possibilities. Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013: 17) articulate this by saying:

'our attempt is to shift research from an information society to an in-form-ation society, from being to becoming, from knowing the world to being in the world as one 'object' amongst many and one species amongst many species, privileged certainly, but radically centred'

Here we further break down subject/object distinctions and my thinking with multiple theorists seems to culminate and cross at this junction. This is a significant point for this thesis and its evolution.

# Reaching a Plateau

## Chapter 10: A clash of philosophies?

‘Change is coming. I know it. I feel it in the air,’ Mohriza announced to nobody in particular. He hadn’t even seen The Wisp drift into his cabin.

Mohriza’s dials and instruments had told him that the air pressure was very low and the winds were now coming from a different direction. That morning he had written in his field notes about how he could feel a significant change. Yet all looked normal on the ground below. The Coosurs and Teveners were following their usual weekday routines. Business was occurring as usual. He couldn’t quite put his finger on it, but knew that something was coming.

‘I agree with you, for once, my friend,’ whispered The Wisp, causing Mohriza’s to almost fall off his chair. He managed to regain his balance and composure but his maps and book lay scattered on the worn out rug.

‘For what do I own the pleasure, Sir?’ enquired Mohriza, knowing that over the many years it was a rare experience to come face to face with The Wisp.

‘Tell me about the ‘Upper Lands’,’ was all The Wisp would say in response. Then silence was left hanging in the room.

Mohriza knew there was a deeper meaning to this question, but he was always eager to share his research and findings. ‘Well the Upper Lands,’ he began, ‘describes a peculiar and unusual part of the island that contains a high plateau that is inaccessible to the islanders. It appears it is a place that they revere, shown through its mention in cultural artefacts such as poetry, music and paintings. However, the islanders rarely venture into this part of the islanders. I understand that there is a mythology associated with the Upper Lands that it contains the finest trees which hold special properties. It is this wood that is most desired for creating their beloved totemicals....’

‘Rubbish!’ interrupted The Wisp, almost shouting. His glow was dull and faint and he constantly shifted from side to side, unable to stay completely still. ‘Such a



place does not exist'. Mohriza was shocked by such an outburst. The Wisp had always appeared so calm. It was clear to Mohriza that this wasn't going to be an easy conversation. Tentatively he replied, 'As a scientist I can only comment on the observable phenomenon and after years of studying the island I can confirm the presence of an 'Upper Land'. However, I am aware that the plateau does not live up to the expectations of the islanders. It is a barren, flat landscape with a very limited ecosystem. These 'perfect trees' simply do not exist'.

It was The Wisp's turn for a monologue. 'You seem to place your scientific observations above everything else, Mohriza, and this is where you fail. You see, not everything that is worthy of exploration is observable and measureable. The Upper Lands does not exist. It is an aspirational image that the islanders have internalized. I propose that the reason that the plateau you have observed remains untouched is because most of the islanders know that in pursuing their dream, they will be left wanting more. The reality is always a let down. The Upper Lands is not really a place but is within. You and the islanders have completely missed the point.'

Mohriza was unsure of what to say. Confrontation was not his thing. The fact that he lived most of his life in isolation was an indication of how difficult he found any social interaction, especially with such a creature as The Wisp.



**Still taken from Research Film**

The thing that they seemed to agree on was that the Upper Lands would not live up to the expectations of those that sought it. It had somehow been corrupted by the various island societies as they continuously search for 'beauty' and a way to make their totemicals finer than anyone elses. Mohriza and The Wisp had hit the stall point of their conversation. The notion of 'beauty' was something that they would have to save for a later time. Instead they sat in silence for some time, the

atmosphere broken only by the breeze around them and the creaks from the rusty scopes, shifting on their fixings. Mohriza didn't notice the moment that The Wisp had left the cabin, but when he finally did, he wasn't quite sure what he would be writing in his field books that evening.

## Art and Film Assemblages

Turning to this thesis in itself, as suggested, I have designed and shaped it to have its own agency. This momentum has come firmly from the unruly streak that had developed within me to resist the norms of thesis writing and to explore alternate ways to raise issues and create argument. Earlier drafts of writing had drawn me down more conventional and linear models of writing. Within the context of my research area this did not seem to do itself justice. It left me, and in all likelihood the reader, wanting something more. This has led to a position where I have attempted to create forces that serve to interrupt and interfere. This began when I started to write in non-linear ways, refusing to start at the beginning and move towards the end. Instead I have tended to start at the end and constantly oscillate back and forth through my thinking and time. The reader has to work through this in an adventure of co-producing (non)sense as the affective and vitality of the whole piece is allowed to shine and shimmer, with the reader bringing their own understandings and experiences to the assemblage. I aim therefore to elevate their status from passive reader to an active and vibrant person engaging with the ideas of the becoming-thesis.

Furthermore, I have deliberately and purposefully attempted to unsettle the 'straighter' narrative writing through the use of other ways of communicating or with very different styles of writing. These include the use of images, poetry and personal journal writing. They are embedded within the text with the intention of provoking and interrogating the other forms of communication that surround it. Again these onto-epistemological shudders are afforded their own agency and vitality. Therefore I avoid trying to explain what it is that I believe they communicate, in favour of allowing others to interpret in different ways. It is fitting that they allow affect to occur and serve to *uncontain* the thesis. By this I mean that rather than the writing becoming something that is bordered, it gives permission for it to expand and fire off in different directions. It gives the reader multiple ways to think and feel about the written ideas in relation to themselves and their positioning or identity. This mimics my expanding thinking in relation to affect and atmospheres, insofar that these concepts will continually resist becoming bounded and will be in a continual state of flux and vibrancy.

In stating the case above, it is clear the way that I am positioning the piece. Yet I must acknowledge its position in time, from both a past and a future perspective. It is only through decades of changes with the field of social science research that I find myself permitted to write in 'other' ways.

My work owes a huge amount of debt to researchers working within the visual methodologies and arts-based approaches. These include Rose (2012) Prosser and Burke (2007), Emmel and Clark (2011), Banks (2001) and Pink (2013). What these researchers have in common is the ways that they have demonstrated that art-based approaches could be afforded academic rigour as they paved the way for creativity and alternative methods. This includes the use of still images and 'research walks', through to Pink's (2013) research into everyday practices using images and film. Within Banks's (2001) work there is a united voice in acknowledging the power of the visual as well as the benefits given through a multi-disciplinary approaches. Prosser and Burke (2007) demonstrate how contemporary visual methods has a place within modern social science research alongside a commitment to elevating the status of 'child' within the research. No longer were children passive participants in the research process, but instead visual methodologies allowed a more child-centric approach. A desire that I have already identified within this project.

### *The child*

Tracing the positioning of child within social sciences leads further back to postmodern approaches where children were given a voice. An example of this is mosaic approach used by Clark (2005) where she wanted young children to be listened to. The name mosaic implicates the combining of traditional methodologies of observation and interview alongside participatory methods, such as the visual. All these have a very specific ethical desire to give voice to the child without making them feel excluded from the research process. Thomson (2008) also presents a strong argument for giving voice to young people in research, rather than judging them based on seemingly abstract notions such as their age or perceived capabilities. I see such research as a stepping-stone towards my own positioning as though the research here was dipping its toe into the water and exploring reactions from the research community. As I have explored within my section on 'morality' one of the main choices around collecting film data, stemmed from a desire to give children a voice and reduce a sense of over-reliance on the

written word. I suggest that arts-based research practices lend themselves to working with children and young people, as there is a sense that this creates opportunities to wider participation in research and avoid excluding participants. Clark (2005) acknowledges the limitations and issues, particularly around language and power, and the ways that these structures might construct 'a child'. Whilst I required more from my project, such approaches provide an important precedent and in many ways paved the way.

### *Film as research*

In a similar way, the use of film within research can also be traced back to visual anthropology, including the classical works of Flaherty, Vertov, Marshall and Mead on documentary and ethnographic film. These social anthropologists were among a group of ethnographers that employed film and represented an emerging and evolving approach to how the visual image would represent others. 'Nanook of the North' (Flaherty, 1922) is the classic example of this, but even at this early stage there was a positioning of the film-maker in the way they wanted their film to be viewed. Flaherty employed a story telling theme to his film and its status as documentary was questioned by the way that scenes had been staged. Vertov in contrast purposefully enabled the viewer to see that there was no realism to his film. 'The Man with the Movie Camera' (Vertov, 1929) for example treated the subject in more analytical ways with a sense of optimism for the future. It is fascinating to read MacDougall's (1978) paper on ethnographic film as it captures the way that this genre of research was shifting and how technology was contributing in part to this. Even during this time there was a sharp understanding for the need of a critical film genre. This was certainly what I demanded from my film and I wished to move away from the dominance within educational research of using film to 'capture' the classroom environment, whilst lacking this critical edge.

### Cameraman

**You must see all suffering,  
all cruelty, all injustice, all pain:  
you must fix your eye on the  
starving,  
the tortured and the executed: you  
must look away from the nothing.**

**You must not turn your hand  
To feed children, nor caress  
The dying, nor to defend  
victims. You keep the lens  
in front of your mind,**

**that others may reach  
into pockets, knock on doors,  
dig wells. You are the itch  
in others; you can make them  
see clear, if only you watch**

**exactly; if you record  
just what happened. Do not be  
tempted  
to turn the camera inward:  
your stricken looks are no concern  
of the public's. They need the word**

**on what you saw, not how  
you felt. It is they who must feel  
they saw it; they were there; so  
involved, they condemn somewhat  
the remote likes of you**

***Sheenagh Pugh (1990)***

The next shift in terms of film came about in the 60s and 70s with Direct Cinema and Cinema Verite as concepts. Saunders (2007) articulates the ways that cinema and film was used in the 1960s using examples of The Beatles, John F Kennedy and Bob Dylan. Direct cinema refers to what we would now call the 'fly on the wall' and attempts to capture the observable as it happens. However, rather than viewing these examples as factual documentary, it is possible to view them within cultural and socio-politic terms. These are therefore far away from an observational film that aims to espouse notions of partiality and opinion. Despite their attempts to render the camera and film-maker invisible, this was impossible. There is always a rendering of the film-maker since the choices made throughout the filming are mediated through the mind of the film-maker.

Cinema Verite, in contrast, acknowledged that the film-maker and camera are present and make this explicit to the viewer, attempting to reveal a more 'truthful' representation of the observed. As MacDougall acknowledged however, the camera itself can be quite blind as it is possible to see without looking. By this he is referring to the art of noticing and being attentive to things. It begs the question of what the camera has actually failed to capture and begins to cast doubt over the ability to find a truth within film. What was interesting with my research film, was that the actual aim of attempting to represent how the school would have an affect on you, was actually something not visual. It could therefore be argued that this was an impossible task – the atmosphere could never actually be captured and would always resist. Yet the film had a potentiality and vitality that would do something more and prompt the viewer to respond.

Finally, I arrive at queerer approaches around the relationship between art and film. The break here is away from linear narratives towards fragmentary assemblages and dissonant images. Techniques were sought to make the unseen and that which normally escapes the film, to enter the consciousness of the viewer. This therefore moves towards the positioning that I took with my research film. The editing process is always required and this ensures that the original footage is always re-appropriated and re-imagined. Rather than see this as a negative it allowed me to open up spaces. Using existing film and images, alongside the research data would enable the vibrancy of the piece to be seen. The contrasts and similarities seek to enhance the primary film data whilst also beginning to create narratives and affects.

#### *Art as Research/Research as Art*

Ethnographic conceptualism links the study of anthropology with art, essentially described as ethnography conducted as conceptual art. Ssorin-Chaikov (2013) describes conceptual art as that which reduces objects to concepts, leading to a questioning of that concept among the audience. 'A work of art, from this point of view, equals questioning what art is, a depiction of how whatever is taken as art is framed and situated. It makes art out of its audiences and their reactions' (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2013: 7). It is therefore a powerful form of ethnography that does things not just through articulating what is said, but by subverting language and therefore power. The 'Guest/Guessed book' became an important artefact within the project as it attempted to provide a record of people who viewed the research film or heard a reading of 'Reaching a Plateau'. It does indeed seek to make art out of the audience and their reactions. The curation of the whole thesis should be seen as a triptych with the Research Film, Guest/Guessed Book and the completed Thesis, appreciated together, combining to form a whole piece.

Oliver and Badham (2013: 157) suggest that 'there is no object but the practice; the practice is the object(ive)'. This complexity I find fascinating particularly when placed into the context of the education system. This immediately brings me back the piece 'Riverbed' by Eliasson and the way that the work resists becoming fixed and the practice of being within the art is significant. I believe there huge potential for ethnographic conceptualism to be used within educational





An assemblage of images linked to this chapter

research since it offers the potential to produce some fascinating and exciting research.

A further strand within this exploration of art-based research practice is 'ethnographic surrealism', which was classically described by James Clifford (1981). He saw the ways that ethnography and surrealism may overlap, whilst also recognizing how blurry these may be since neither are stable entities. He defines surrealism as 'an aesthetic that values fragments, curious collections, unexpected juxtapositions – that works to provide the manifestation of extraordinary realities drawn from the domains of the erotic, exotic, and the unconscious' (Clifford, 1981: 540). He goes on to note that the surrealists had an attitude against the traditional notion of making the unfamiliar comprehensible and instead 'tended to act in the reverse sense, by making the familiar strange.' This then constitutes a 'continuous play of the familiar and the strange', of which ethnography and surrealism are two elements (Clifford, 1981: 542). Clifford writes that it serves to 'attack the familiar, provoking the irruption of otherness - the unexpected' (Clifford, 1988: 145).

Clifford uses many historical examples to show how ethnographic surrealism developed over the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Paris. This includes Georges Bataille who would repeat the phrase from Mauss that 'taboos are made to be violated'. From this Bataille suggests that one may refrain from murder, or may go to war, with both being acts generated around processes of killing. In a sense this is aiming to make the everyday be seen as more perverse, and is a way to turn the everyday accepted practices back on themselves. Another example is that of the act of human sacrifice as studied by Metraux and Rivet. Death in this Aztec context was considered as insignificant, with a standard juxtaposition of ugly-beauty and normal-repugnant. As Clifford describes, it becomes 'simultaneously, a "human slaughterhouse" and a gorgeous "Venice" of canals and flowers' (Bataille, 1930: 13). It is only our cultural discourses that allow us today to view such practices from the past, and to place cultural judgements on them.

What I am drawn to within this genre is the fact that the juxtapositions and aesthetic elements of ethnographic surrealism become paramount. Even the definitions of ethnography and surrealism lack an anchor and the ideological boundaries shift and ebb, yet these juxtapositions are active and provoking. Clifford, for example, talks about Walter Benjamin's work, 'The Storyteller' which

contains a 'continuous oral narrative and shared experience to a cultural style characterized by bursts of "information" – the photograph, the newspaper clip, the perceptual shocks of a modern city' (Clifford, 1988: 119). We end up with research and writing which avoid homogeneity, but the cuts and sutures are left raw in all their glory. Something else is produced which offers an opportunity for ethnographic researchers within education to add other research methodologies to the field.

In summary, I hope to have made it explicit the way that ethnographic and artistic methods of research have continuously evolved and resisted the conventions that existed at that time. It is only through this evolution that we get to the point where academic research can be conceived in different ways. There is an acknowledgement that the historical development of arts-based practices and the use of film in social science research has a long history. It is this history that allows the work that I am producing within this thesis, to be accepted as research. It is tempting at this point to attempt to classify my thesis and the varied 'texts' or data to fit with the variety of research genres that I have explored. However, I do not feel this is desirable or necessary. Instead I see how aspects of my work flows into and through alternative genres, in a deliberate act of generating intensities and stutters. The writing acknowledges the forerunners and pathfinders but actively avoids anchoring itself.

# Reaching a Plateau

## Chapter 11: Leaving

Everything was prepared. River had filled two knapsacks with all the provisions that they would need, including food, water, torches and the map. They had all the usual survival equipment that would be taken on longer hunts into the jungle by the Teveners. The main addition was the coils of climbing ropes. They were sure to need this when they reached the plateau. The bags had been hidden in scrub on the edge of the farm and things were starting to settle down for the evening, the sun setting slowly on the horizon. Black coils of rope were tied to the bags, which made them twice as heavy, but there was no doubting the need for these ropes. The other Coosur were following the same evening routines and River and Cobain attempted to give off the same calm signals. Yet, inside they felt their hearts racing. It would soon be time to go.

It was slow progress in the night as they trudged through the dense forest. Moments of moonlight were helpful as the cloud would regularly clear. They stuck close together, working in teams to gnaw their way through the impassable parts of the wood. They wondered how long it would be until their absence was noted.

## Chapter 12: Coosur Council Meeting

They had know that some of the younger Coosur were showing signs of difference. **While one child might see a locked gate and locked doors [...] as trapping them, another child may believe that it is done to create a safe and relaxed environment and atmosphere<sup>7</sup>.** The Elder Coosur had gathered to discuss the news that River and Cobain had left their farm. It was no surprise that these two had shown feelings of being trapped. In fact many remember them from birth, always attempting to scale the nursery pens. Some were surprised that it had actually taken them so long.

Secretly, some members of the Elder Coosur Council admired the qualities that River and Cobain had displayed. They too desired the exquisite wood foretold in the 'story of the imprisoned hunters', long passed down through years of oral story

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<sup>7</sup> Quote from 'Guest/Guessed Book'. Student Teacher



### Still taken from Research Film



telling around the camp fire. But they hadn't been brave enough to pursue this perilous journey. They also had serious concerns about the way that the young

Coosur were increasingly required to follow the '**norm**' **where there are certain rules and regulations to adhere by. Perhaps this was causing unhappiness for some of [the young]**<sup>8</sup>. This escape could act as the wake up call that announced that wider change was needed, and the Elders were clear that their young needed their support.

A team had already been dispatched by the council in an attempt to find the young Coosur. What wasn't clear was whether this was to prevent them or aid them in their quest.

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<sup>8</sup> Quote from 'Guest/Guessed Book'. Student Teacher

## Coding the Atmosphere

In my work I have frequently claimed to be against representation, and have already explored some key points. Rather than suggest that all educational research slips towards positivistic paradigms I can now see that not only does the field of qualitative work in educational research include original and thought provoking methodologies, but that processes such as coding might have a place. In terms of coding, Maclure (2013: 164) suggests that 'there is languorous pleasure and something resolute in the slow intensity of coding – an ethical refusal to take the easy exit to quick judgment, free-floating empathy, or illusions of data speaking for itself...When practiced unfaithfully, without rigid purpose or a fixed terminus, the slow work of coding allows something other, singular, quick and ineffable to irrupt into the space of analysis'. Similarly Lecercle (2002: 53) sees that the logic of representation offers 'the structuring process that constructs a liveable world around us...[producing] stable meaning and stable subjects to exchange it'.

Coding allows an arborescent structure, with fixed relations between different objects/subjects. Maclure (2013a) suggests that this logic means that almost any phenomenon can be coded. Nelson's (2000) analysis of the concept of 'crying' is fascinating to read, where crying is categorized into multiple categories including; 'healthy crying,' 'crying for no reason', 'prolonged or frequent crying associated with depression' as well as forms of inhibited crying, such as 'detached tearlessness'. Relating this to my research interest in atmosphere it is fascinating to contemplate coding categories. We might find positive atmospheres; 'happy atmosphere,' 'friendly atmosphere,' and a 'relaxed atmosphere'; being contrasted with negative atmospheres; 'spooky atmosphere,' 'tense atmosphere,' and a 'violent atmosphere'. Such coding would be valid, and some might suggest that this offers an experimental assemblage allowing a creative and imaginative approach. However, this would lead to research into atmospheres that asked different questions to the ones that I am interested in.

My resistance to such an approach to research has been that it always misses something and is never quite enough. This is recognized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who note that something always exceed or evades the action of coding, leaving something illegible and unrecognizable. Lecercle (2002: 54) similarly

wonders whether an ‘unholy mixture’ in which objects, utterances, institutions, bodies and fragments are related rather than existing in an orderly hierarchy. Thinking with atmospheres I believe warrants this approach, where the minor moments, the shifts, the unperceived and the differences are of most interest. These are easily overlooked when focusing on a range of coded categories. I suggest that a coded approach to the school atmosphere would mean that we become most interested in the labelling of the atmosphere, rather than thinking and grappling with the complexity of what may really be going on. As Maclure (2013: 169) posits, ‘coding renders everything that falls within its embrace explicable’ and I increasingly find that the atmosphere will always evade the explicable. Indeed, Maclure goes on to suggest that ‘[coding] handles poorly that which exceeds and preceded ‘capture’ by language, such as the bodily, asignfying, disrupting (and connecting) intensities of affect (Maclure, 2013: 170)

### **Something about love**

**We care about each other in this school. The rainbow fish tells us about love. I am proud of the school and the other children and how they develop.**

**I like school because you don’t really see your friends really often and it is a time when you meet up and chat. You also make new friends.**

**When we are sat in the hall together we feel the memories of when we were sitting in Reception at the front, but now we sit at the back. You think ‘I was once that small.’**

**Student voices – interview data**

Extending this discussion we can argue that the atmosphere lies at the boundary of language and body. As such we can focus on the disjunction that takes place here. By breaking down the certainty and the static connections of coding, the affective aspects of atmosphere – the fear, the joy, the calmness, the tranquility – surge up and swell. Rather than attempting a classification of these, instead we need to become entangled with the data, folding in our experiences and allow thinking to grow. It is an intense and difficult commitment to researching in this way. Maclure describes how ‘it is imperative to slow down the facile machinery of interpretation so that it catches on snags, the ‘lucky finds’, the marginalia and the odd details that fascinate the researcher and draw her into the weave of discourse, instead of allowing her to rise above it’ (Maclure, 2013: 174).



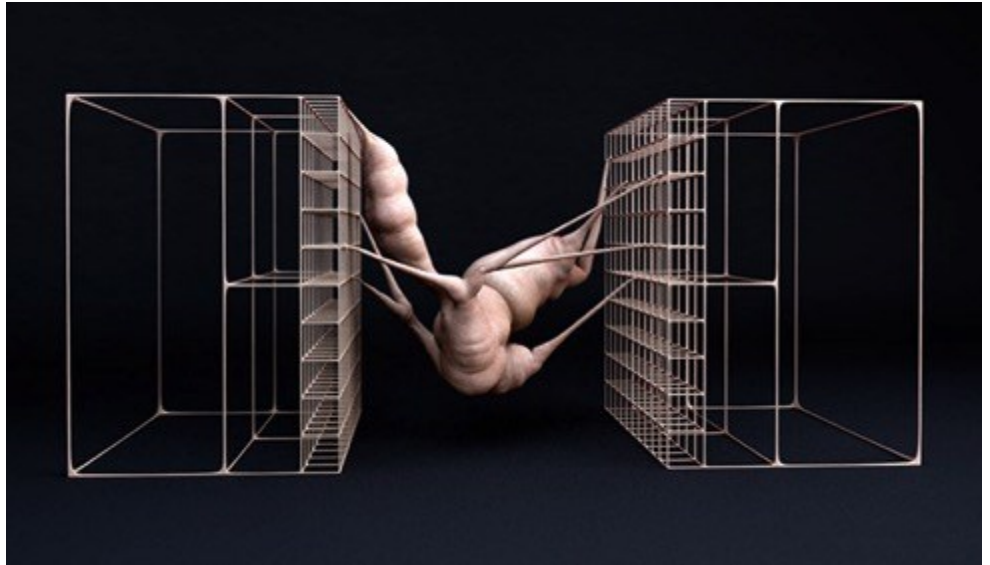
Here we again speak of an assemblage and the logic of assemblages. It speaks again of Lecerle's 'unholy mixture' where words do not represent in uncomplicated ways and a slippery sense emerges in the writing. Maclure ends up thinking with the data in terms of 'wonder' as it requires a disruption of the boundary between power and knowledge (Maclure, 2013). For atmospheres there is a need to wonder - to play with data in interesting ways to think deeper and to move away from coding, representing and methods that arrest it. 'If I feel wonder, I have chosen something that has 'already' chosen me. Wonder is in this sense indissolubly relational – a matter of strange connection' (Maclure, 2013: 181). This last quotation resonates strongly with me, since atmosphere appeared to speak to me at the early stages of beginning this research. This research has allowed me to wander and wonder alongside atmospheres.

## The Image of Atmosphere

Deleuze discusses a set of presuppositions about the way that thought should be considered – explaining that this ‘image of thought’ is damagingly restrictive. His postulates give a sense of the way that it is attractive to think in terms of identity over the relations of differences in the repetitions. To avoid this restriction, Deleuze suggests ‘the true role of philosophy should be to forget the image of thought and connect to what he calls *Ideas*, the transcendental condition for thought and that which vivifies actual lives through intensities, through difference in itself’ (Williams, 2003: 112). The Idea is difficult to grasp but roughly equates to a movement without a fixed identity. It is a set of pure differences which resists identification and can only be deduced through a engagement with sensations.

Representation becomes problematic for Deleuze as the political and moral aspects of the argument cut off the intensities offered through creative repetitions. This is because representation privileges identity, analogy, similarity and opposition, over repetition and pure differences. It is a repressive process which causes us to miss and for there to be a lack. The atmosphere appears to leak out from representation and force into view its sign. As Williams (2003: 121-122) puts it, ‘when we mistakenly think we have sensed something that we cannot sense, we have not sensed that thing but merely suffered an illusion or made a mistake’. Atmosphere continually seems to suggest that it cannot be sensed, which implies that those who label an atmosphere are simply mistaken.

This links back to the suggestion of the Deleuzian ‘Idea’ in the way that it can be thought of as simultaneously undetermined, determinable and determined according to an ideal of infinite determination. Should atmosphere be considered an Ideal then we can draw upon these ways of thinking. I propose that the atmosphere in schools is always undetermined since it can never be fully understood and there is nothing to which it corresponds. This is problematic because something is expressed and however this is described, school staff and pupils will be affected.



**Jason Hopkins (2011) Posthuman Structure I**

The atmosphere however, always remains at the border and resists its Idea becoming determined. Yet it can be argued that the atmosphere is determinable in terms of expressivity when one speaks of the actual atmosphere (something is there and it has a real affect on me – in both physiological and emotional ways). Furthermore, the Idea can be thought of in terms of determination through the ideal of an infinite determination. This is helpful with the atmosphere in imagining an infinite set of determination, such that with this forward movement we get closer to understanding what an atmosphere may be, whilst it always continues its movement. Atmosphere here becomes a representation of a concept, one which causes some affect. This does not mean that it is resolvable since it is never fully determined. This thesis is part of the infinite determination as it seeks to move thinking forward in relation to atmospheres, whilst always attempting to grapple with the fact that it is complex and potentially indeterminable.

## Reaching a Plateau

### Chapter 13: Glacial's choice

Elly tried to calm Glacial, but knew that it was no use. She had been woken by her screams and had immediately rushed over to their farm. Glacial was hysterical and pacing around the half-completed totemicals, causing the young Coosur to cower away. They had never experienced such an emotional outburst from a Tevener. This matched with the fact that a Coosur had never left a farm before their graduation. It was a night of unwelcome firsts. Peace and calmness had reigned over the island for decades and there was a general sense of goodwill and routine following. Elly sat on the stoop, next to her friend, with the freshly brewed tea and decided that the best support she could offer Glacial was just being there for her.



**Still Taken from Research Film**

'What had she done so wrong?' Glacial asked herself. The tears hadn't yet come, although she knew that these would later. She hadn't realized that River and Cobain had been so unhappy. She knew that at times her reputation of coldness and strictness was talked about by others, but she didn't agree with these. Glacial felt that she was an outstanding farmer who followed all the requirements of the Farming Board and kept up to date with her practice. It might have appeared to the outsider that it was hardness, but inside Glacial was much more emotional and soft than she let on. In fact she regarded the Coosur in her care with the greatest of respect, as though they were her only children, just like Elly and the other

farmers. She naturally wanted to do her best for them all, but especially for River and Cobain for whom she had a secret soft spot. Their little battles were sometimes tiresome, but Glacial saw them as a natural part of their personality development; River and Cobain were desperate to express themselves and have some individuality. River in particular loved to make the other Coosur laugh. 'What have I done so wrong?' Glacial shouted to nobody in particular.

She had joined Elly on the stoop and took the mug of warm green tea. This was something to occupy her hands rather than something she wanted to drink. As there was no precedence for this, there was no blueprint for what a farmer should do in this situation. Although Glacial knew what she was going to do next, she just didn't know if she was brave enough to say it out loud. She was unsure of what the outcomes might be.

Seconds of silence passed between the two Teveners. To Glacial it felt much longer.

'I'm going after them,' Glacial suddenly blurted out.

Elly continued her silence. She knew that once Glacial had made her mind up there was no convincing her otherwise. Glacial's love of her Coosur meant she would stop at nothing to make sure they were safe and well.

## Schooling the Narrative

*'Narratives are powerful, human and integrated; truly qualitative'*

Cohen *et al.* (2011: 554)

Writing the narrative story entitled 'Reaching a Plateau' was, for me, an experimental approach to thinking with the research data and a way that I could resist casting my own (master) interpretation of the emergent liveliness of the film, interviews and post-film audience reflections. It was an attempt to play with the data as well as being another act of rebellion, which has been a feature of my work. Here I propose it opposes the perceived supremacy of coding and coding-derived analysis. According to Cohen *et al.* (2011) narrative and storytelling has been a comparatively neglected area in educational research. It appeared to offer me an opportunity to express some of my thinking in relation to the research, without being constrained by the need to conform to academic language. Furthermore, it appeared to make the data more lively and infuse it with its own agentic capabilities, which fitted well within my paradigm. I therefore hoped that it



would allow teachers to connect with the data and give them freedom to make their own interpretations. Drawing on Thody (1997) my aim is to attempt to engage the reader and their minds, rather than simply stating what my own interpretation is.

**Nud Cycladic (16), 2010 Sarah Lucas. © Sarah Lucas, Photography Julian Simmons**

Bruner (1986: 24) explores the notion that stories are able to make the familiar strange, 'rescuing it from obviousness'. Within the story 'Reaching a Plateau' it could be argued that this was indeed my intention, particularly because I created my own strange fantasy world. Indeed, the reader has to potentially work hard to understand this imaginary world and a new set of vocabularies around the inhabitants and cultural practices. However, I would argue that much of my research around schools and atmospheres was far from 'familiar', despite the fact I

am interested in the everyday practices. Rather than make the familiar strange I would argue that I was making the strange, stranger. Whilst much of the matter within the narrative assemblage I have written were often metaphorical and symbolic in my own mind, I have resisted the temptation to make this clear to the reader. Atmospheres, for example, are an integral part of the story to me yet this is not made explicit. I believe that this 'hard work' for the reader is what is productive and exciting about their engagement with a narrative account.

Narrative inquiry can exist in many epistemological forms, including as paradigmatic and hermeneutic. The paradigmatic approach aligns with positivism, where the personal aspects of narrative writing are transcended in order to explore cause and effect. It will not be a surprise to the reader to see that I favour the hermeneutic approach which accepts and celebrates the 'personal'. Indeed it recognizes the highly personal story as placed within a cultural context, with the self at the heart, mirroring culture (Josselson, 2004). Echoing my earlier expressions of discomfort as part of the EdD, writing narratively is not something that comes naturally to me nor is something that I have previously engaged with. As a result it is notable that the structure of 'Reaching a Plateau' follows a linear and traditional story structure, with the chronology progressing through the piece. This goes against my earlier claims of attempting to produce a thesis which is written in a non-linear way. I argue that I made up the story in a free-flowing organic way, but cannot deny that my whole life experiences have been storied. I enjoy reading fiction and always have done, so these micro-influences will impact upon the style of my narrative writing. As McLean *et al.* (2007) note the narrative identity is a cyclical process mediated between storytelling, listening to stories and the creation of the self.

One of the reasons that I fragment the narrative is to continue to create a jolt or jarring for the reader – to deliberately interrupt to flow. As a complete whole text my narrative story lacked an impact within the thesis. In the Deleuzian notion of plateau, I see the narrative writing as a resting point throughout the piece. The plateau as symbolic is both implicit and explicit within this piece of writing. The story not only serves to disrupt me as the author it also acts in certain ways towards the reader.



Through the supervision process it was also put to me that the narrative writing was following a 'quest narrative'. This was not something that consciously happened for me, but the quest narrative is well established and studied. It consists of a journey that is characterized by discontent and the desire for something else, something more meaningful, real or something akin to 'truly living'. The traveller leaves the safety and comfort of their everyday life to take a dangerous journey to somewhere uncomfortable and uncertain. Ultimately this then leads to discovery and an insight into life and self. Whilst this was seemingly accidental in my work there is a clear parallel in the affective experiences of children progressing through the school system, in something akin to the clichéd 'journey'.

Whilst considering the institution of the school it is worth exploring Goffman's (1961) classic piece on Asylums. Goffman offers a narrative account of the everyday lived experiences of the residents of the asylum, which provides data that may have been lost had it been presented or interpreted in a different way. Cohen *et al.* (2011) suggest that the idea of the 'total institution' in this piece is silently used as analogous with schools. Indeed, like the morality of my research, Goffman tells his story from a sympathetic view towards the patients, in a similar way that I attempt to explore schools from the child's affective experience. This produces a different account than it would had the voice of the hospital staff/school staff been stronger. Overall there is a strong and powerful 'force' emerging from Goffman's work which illuminates the everyday world and its' artefacts.

As well as the 'Reaching a Plateau' story it could also be argued that the reflective journal entries also serve as examples of narrative writing. During the taught parts of the course it became clearer to me how much of the everyday world is storied, even in subjects that we perceive as stable and understood, such as Science. As the new materialism strand of work emerged it was clear that there is so much dynamism and instability, in all matter, that it seems appropriate that narrative is used as part of this genre. I began my research journal thinking that this would be 'the correct thing to do', but found that writing simply about the research specific activities was stifling and unproductive. Instead I decided to notice. As Mason (2002) suggests, this is more than everyday noticing, but a way to develop your professional practice in order to become more sensitive and observant of the world around you. This became my focus for the research journal entries, where I would

tune in and attempt to write. This became a powerful force and as my thesis developed I was able to shift the privileging of noticing the human-world, to noticing the whole material world and the interactions between them. This was particularly inspired by Bennett (2010) and her idea of 'vibrant matter', and I attempted to find vibrancy is everything, even if at first it didn't 'shine'.

Influenced by the reading of Kristeva (1985) I then decided to use the research journal entries, alongside other forms of writing and imagery as direct parts of the thesis. Again, I attempt to allow them to speak for themselves and avoid the tendency to explain their positioning. Sometimes there is a congruency alongside the main text that envelops it, and other times there is jarring or misalignment. These pieces are very personal to me and represent the 'liminal experience' of writing this thesis (Miles and Wattchow, 2015). This describes the crossing of a threshold and the way that as I shape the thesis it also shapes me. In this changing of myself it is impossible to return to my earlier positions and recognize the shifts so easily. Cousin suggests such transformations involve an 'ontological as well as a conceptual shift', that is, 'we are what we know' (Cousin, 2006: 4). The research journal therefore provides some markers for this.

# Reaching a Plateau

## Chapter 14: The Climb

It towered over them, dwarfing them as they stood at the base of the cliffs. They had skirted them for several hours in the hope of finding a break in the wall, a chance to scale the rock face. Their tongues hung limply in a vain attempt to cool themselves. The trek had already taken much of their strength and enthusiasm. Cobain sat in her harness and River busied himself with the remaining equipment. She knew that this charade was River's own way of calming himself and asserting his self-appointed position as leader of the expedition.

In some parts there were huge waterfalls cascading down the cliff, which appeared to have a huge step midway up. Ferns and mosses covered the rockface around this and the dampness gave off a strange mist. The whole area smelled of dampness with a faint tinge of decay. They had managed to find a relatively dry part of the cliff in order to give them the best possible chance. Their harnesses were in place and River would lead the climb, clipping them into the rock face as they ascended. Cobain would be tethered to River and would follow. Another tether gave off a strange feeling to Cobain, but at least this one was voluntary. She felt that this was an important part of the preparation and an important safety precaution.

Finally, they could put it off no longer. River was off and making quick progress as he leapt between ledges and balanced carefully.

'Climb when ready,' bawled River, several minutes later, and it was now Cobain's time to join him on the climb.

'I hope this is worth it,' she muttered to herself as she took her first step upwards.

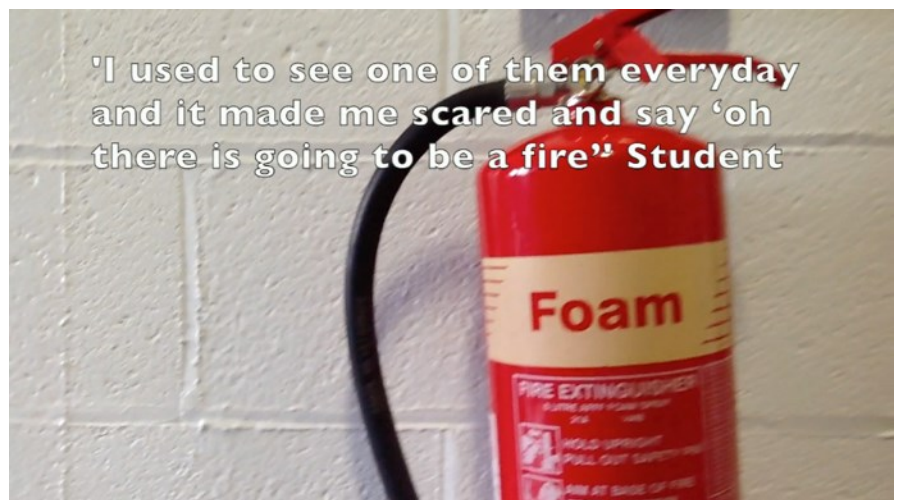
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She couldn't look down. Cobain, who had been brave at all times, hadn't realized quite how being at height would affect her. At times she felt frozen and it was impossible to move. Clinging tightly to a narrow ledge was not her idea of fun. Although the rope was tying her safely to River, she wondered what would happen

if he fell? He certainly wasn't taking the same care as her as he leapt from shelf to shelf. It wasn't that safe if he plummeted to the ground and took her with him. A weakness had developed at her knees, yet she knew she had to go on.

They had reached the halfway point where there was a large step into the cliff covered in small trees and bushes. At last it was a chance to catch their breath. They ate more of the rations that they had bought and sat for the most part in silence. So far it had been a few hours to get to this point, but Cobain wasn't sure if she could sustain the same level of pace for the next part of the climb. The damp in this area was all encompassing and their bags were heavy with the dew. The sun was

beginning to subdue and she hoped that the dropping temperatures would offer her further respite and give her at least a fighting chance of reaching the top.



**Still taken from Research Film**

River knew that she was slowing things down. Without her he was sure that he would have made it to the top by now. It wasn't a race, he kept having to remind himself. The reward when they finally reached the Upper Lands would be well worth it and this dangerous part of the journey would soon be forgotten. Plus, they were a team. Despite the slow pace, River knew that he wouldn't be brave enough to do this alone.

### **Chapter 15: Glacial's pursuit**

'HeIIlloooo,' came the shout from the valley below, startling River and Cobain. They had assumed that they were alone. Despite the panic in the shout, they were sure that they recognized the voice.

She had made slow progress initially as she moved through the dense forest. Eventually, however, she was able to find a track and a pathway was finally revealed. From this point Glacial was able to make good progress in her attempt to catch up with her beloved Coosur. Pausing for breath, she looked at the group photograph that she always carried in her pocket. The two young Coosur were new to the farm at this point at only 5 years of age. Even then, they stood out as slightly different, and it was at this point that Glacial had developed a soft spot for them.

At first she thought they were just on the run, in search of escape. But after a few hours Glacial started to think there was something more about this 'escape'. It was more like a mission than anything else. Occasionally Glacial was able to spy a steep cliff in the distance. Something that could only mean one thing...The Upper Lands. Would River and Cobain, really be on a mission to reach the Upper Lands? At first, this thought was ridiculous to Glacial, but as more time went on she realized that this was of course the truth. They were going to add their own chapter to the legend.

Only when she reached the cracked rock face and spied the two bodies up high, ascending the cliffs, were her fears confirmed. She didn't have the time to drink in the scene and notice the beauty that surrounded her. Instead Glacial's impulses again took over as she immediately started to climb after them. It was dangerous for the Coosur, but surely it was much worse without rope and harness.

River and Cobain looked down and it was impossible to deny that Glacial had followed them. Their brains were too scrambled to process this information. But dread turned to shock when they saw her climbing. Glacial's human body appeared better suited to rock climbing than their own and they could see that she was making rapid progress. This was their mission and they couldn't think why this cold Tevener would come after them. This, at least, gave them some impetus and River and Cobain moved upwards at a faster pace. The pain and fear subdued by the panic of them being potentially thwarted and not able to complete their quest.

### Still taken from Research Film



It had been years since she had climbed. The numb sensation had reappeared in her fingers as she found muscles in her digits that hadn't been used for some time. The lactic acid had built

up in her upper arms and so Glacial relied more on her legs as she approached her much needed rest stop offered by the first large step. With no water, she merely sat still, shaking out her legs and arms to give them much needed respite. River and Cobain were clearly visible now only a couple of hundred metres above her. She could see their occasional glances down towards her.

'Come down, please?' she shouted up, but as the words left her lips she knew it was wasted energy.

It was easier for River and Cobain to ignore Glacial. Cobain had avoided looking down throughout the climb. She wanted no reminder of how high she was. But the presence of their farmer, in such a strange context, was hard to ignore. She was rapidly gaining on them, and Cobain couldn't help but take quick glances down to her.

Glacial had resumed her climbing. Whether it had been loosened by the Coosur or not, it was clear that the large boulder was now coming away from the rock face. Despite the clichés, events did begin to go in slow motion as Glacial desperately searched for another hold for her hands. But the whole block was moving towards her chest, her legs now leaving their holds. Not even a scream left her lips and she felt her body move gracefully into the air.

Both River and Cobain were frozen to the spot witnessing these perverse events take place below them. The air around them had appeared to go slower and the background sounds of song birds and the rustle of leaves seemed to be on hold.

Not even Glacial could fracture the silence. The only clue to the disaster was her eyes. Cobain couldn't take her own eyes away from the extended and shocked look that had crossed Glacial's eyes as she plummeted down.

Cobain immediately looked away and climbed up to the position that River was at. She needed some physical contact at that moment and the two Coosur rested for some time together. There was no need for words. Glacial had fallen from the cliff in an attempt to get to them.



## **Ethics**

Ethics is a (con)textual thing that I believe lies at the heart of much of this project, linking particular with moral aspects of the EdD. For the purposes of this section I have chosen to divide it into Procedure and Politics, Film and Affect because these allow me to approach the issue of ethics from multiple directions.

### ***Ethics of Procedure and Politics***

In this section I will address the pragmatic and classical aspects of ethics which will be familiar to those working in education at all levels of research. These guiding principles are an important aspect of social science research at both institutional levels as well as at personal levels. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) publishes guidance for researchers in education to follow (BERA, 2011), driven by a commitment to adhere to principles of an ethics of respect towards; people, knowledge, democratic values, quality of educational research and academic freedom. Individuals, for example, should be treated 'fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant difference' (BERA, 2011: 5).

There are a number of principles that are followed including participation as voluntary, the right for participants to withdraw at any point, informed consent, protection of privacy and anonymity, and aspects of data protection and storage. For projects working with children, as is mine, there is a commitment for consent to be made in conjunction with a parent or career whom is their legal guardian, as well as informed verbal consent from the young person. Information sheets were given to the children and the research was issued as a whole class, with much debate and discussion. The principles followed included that the 'best interests' of the child is of paramount importance. Furthermore there is a commitment to do no harm to others as part of research.

At an institutional level this research was passed through the faculty ethics committee following my application and ethics checklist. Approval for this was granted. And it is at this point that I believe that many people believe that the ethics ends. A neat tick-box, that indicates that 'everybody is a safe here'. And yet for me, this is probably where ethics comes alive and actually begins. I believe that

ethics should be multi-layered and vibrant. The checklists and some basic standards may be necessary, but these in themselves cannot be disregarded as benign or problematic.

In fact the choice of topic for this section, 'ethics of politics', indicates my understanding that ethics is a highly politicized system. Some of the words and intentions that I have already written above tend to be parroted off without any further consideration. Terms such as 'informed consent' are accepted in unproblematic ways and there is an interesting juncture that 'a child's best interest' is best analysed by the researcher themselves. It doesn't take much to view ethics at this level as loaded with power and privilege. The powerful researcher is able to meet ethical guidelines, whilst treating research participants in an unethical way. It cannot be ignored that 'researchers have authority over what gets said and done' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994: 422), and 'gain power and prestige from their research' (Lincoln, 1995: 285). For me it becomes an issue of morality.

One final point to make is linked to the fact that my research uses more critical ethnographic methods, tending to cut across disciplines. As I have demonstrated with BERA, ethical codes of academic discipline have traditionally been developed by professional associations of the disciplines and specific academic institutions. In multidisciplinary research this can become more complex and there is currently a need for something a little more. For example, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), proposes that ethical research in the social sciences is based on 'six key principles: Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality and transparency; Research staff and participants must normally be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved; The confidentiality of information supplied by research participants and the anonymity of respondents must be respected; Research participants must take voluntarily, free from any coercion; Harm to research participants must be avoided in all instances; The independence of research must be clear, and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be explicit' (ESRC, 2015: 3).

There is a huge overlap here with the guidance from BERA, but there is an implication that multi-disciplinary researchers would need to look at the guidance from multiple disciplines, which at best is wieldy and at worst is potentially dangerous.

## ***Ethics of Film***

The visual researcher is left with fewer texts around what is ethically correct. There is a sense that researchers are left more on the edge of the mainstream conversation here. Rose (2012: 329) suggests that 'most of the principles of ethical social science research are exactly the same whether you are dealing with interview transcripts, ethnographic observation notes or participant-generated collages'. But in this project there are some very specific issues raised in relation to children working with film, and I would like to explore these in a little more detail.

### *Children and participants being identified from the images*

Whilst the project may claim that it will protect the anonymity of participants the use of film means that it is harder to protect children. This is an obvious conflict and one of the reasons that visual research may be considered to have more than a minimal risk of breaching ethical principles. The Visual Sociological Study Group of the British Sociological Association (BSAVSSG, 2006) give more specific advice around anonymity suggesting, 'potential...research participants, especially those possessing a combination of attributes that make them readily identifiable, may need to be reminded that it can be difficult to disguise their identity....'

Within my project, some of this issue was reduced since there is a culture within the research school of collecting film and regularly publishing images of the pupils on the school website. These are freely available to the public and parents give written consent for this as part of the welcome pack on joining the school community. For my project there were two parents who refused their consent. I had to therefore ensure that the children understood that some children were not to be filmed within their own class, and I had to be vigilant of this when editing the film.

Another consideration may have been to filter the images so that the children were unrecognizable. The International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA) recognize

that this is a possibility within their own ethical guidance. Following their guidance (IVSA, 2009), I ensured that the permission form made it explicit that the images of their child may become part of the film. I made the decision not to use deletion or masking as part of the project film after watching other films where children's faces had been blurred. I found these images to be de-humanising and actually quite haunting and based on the filming culture within the school I made the decision to include the children. Visual researchers begin to question the assumption that all images that identifying individuals are unethical. Wiles *et al.* (2008) posit that the person in the film conveys so much information and data, that it is important to retain them to avoid the loss of meaning. Holliday (2004) insists that identifiable images of research participants can actually enhance their power in the research process as they avoid being made invisible. Identifiable images are then rendered as having more ethical potential than anonymised images.

### **House Points**

**When you've been good in class or answer a question, she can give you a house point for you team. It shows that a lot of people in our school behave. Sometimes it makes us behaviour better. I think it does for the younger children. In reception it was more exciting. They get added up and whoever wins gets a trophy. I don't really like getting awards. It's not really that good I don't really add my points on. Like they put them in my book and I go 'alright!' but then don't put them on. If you get second place you don't really get anything. Even if you are like so close to the first place team. We don't really know why they have those names.**

### **Student voices – interview data**

As also stipulated within my ethical application, I made the decision to limit the scope of the film by avoiding placing this in the public domain. This decision was made in order to protect the children and recommended by my institution, despite the fact that it was fairly low risk. I have been explicit in stating that I would use the film within my university teaching role and also in publications and at conferences, rather than placing it openly in the public domain.

A secondary issue that also arises here is around anonymity of place. Clark (2006) notes that this offers another layer of difficulty since people that are familiar with the place will always recognize it. This is a distinct challenge and not one that I believe can be easily overcome. In the film I was careful to ensure that images were not included that had the name or logo of the school written directly on them,

including welcome signs and the school's mission statement. I was also conscious that the school logo/symbol would appear on school uniforms, and avoided any direct shots of these. I know that the headteacher would be relaxed about the school being named in the project, but I felt a commitment to a research ethic that promoted anonymity.

#### *Issue around consent and audiencing*

Whilst a project such as mine clearly gets informed consent there is a further issue around how 'informed' this can be, when it is unclear what images and stories the film data may collect. From the outset I discussed with the young people what our aims and purposes would be for this project. I also produced an information sheet for them as well as the parents and talked this through with them in small groups. As the participants were all under the ages of 16 it is deemed that they are unable to make the decision of informed consent. However, it was still important for me to help construct them as co-researchers, despite having gained full written permission from their parents. As a practicing teacher and university lecturer I also met the requirement to have undergone a full criminal record vetting, having a full and enhanced DRB already in place.

A further issue is that projects also start out planning to do one thing but ultimately ends up doing something else. There is only so much that you can plan in terms of future audiences and it is important that I remain sensitive to this. Should the need arise to use the film in other ways I understand that I would need to seek further permission to do this. It was also pertinent to note that I was intending to use their films in certain ways to edit the film, some of which might be considered unusual and strange to a young child. I made the commitment to show the completed film to the children, to continue to show that they were a part of the process, rather

than this being a process that was done 'to' them. This is an ethical stance of being a collaborative researcher and both Banks (2001) and Rose (2012) suggest that this becomes a strong ethical standpoint.

#### *Issue of who owns the copyright*

Copyright refers to the legal ownership of an image and generally speaking the person who took the image, gains the copyright of this. It is normal practice when working with research participants who are generating images to ask permission to

use their image. This is the legal position, but yet, I felt that it was more complex than this. Visual research ethics tends not to explore these murky waters. The legal position has rarely been challenged along lines of authenticity, originality and authorship with Sturken and Cartwright (2009: 212) acknowledging that 'the digital image raises questions of reproduction and copyright to new levels of intensity'.

Since the raw film data had been collected by multiple participants alongside film data that I had already used, it felt that the copyright was becoming too complex for me to handle. And through the editing and rendering of a final film, would this have copyright across multiple owners? I felt that this was risky from an ethical point of view, since if the child under 16 is unable to give informed consent, how are they able to make copyright decisions about a film that they have contributed to? For this reason I decided to make it explicit at the early stages of the project that the film clips generated by the children would transfer their copyright to me. Some might question this as an ethical decision, as the researcher asserting his power over the participants. However, the blurring of guidance in this area meant it was simpler for this to be the situation, despite the fact that it leaves me feeling slightly uncomfortable. It also allows me to make decisions about the sharing of the film during the post-research phase when I will have no continuing relationship with the research participants.

#### *Visual ethical issues being out of touch with the 'real world'*

One issue that arises out of my readings around ethics with the visual realms is how little guidance there is, and how static and academic this appears to be. We live in a time when the visual image is something we are bombarded with and indeed our own images appears beyond our control. Consider the number of times that we may be filmed by CCTV cameras in any one day (without any consent being given), and in some schools there are even these cameras within the classroom. And generationally young people are adjusting to this world at a faster pace than perhaps our ethical guidelines are. Kress (2010) has argued that issues of consent, privacy, anonymity and copyright seem irrelevant to most people, during a period when the image is frequently generated, shared and circulated. Rose (2012: 323) suggests that 'ethical discourse is alive and well in many locations of contemporary visual cultures'.

Rose (2012) goes on to suggest that we might find ourselves at the point where visual researchers are demanding a different kind of ethics, based not on the discourse of rights, but instead one that continually explores the 'dynamic and relational grounds upon which relations between researcher and researched are played out' (343). Prosser (2005) also recognizes the emergent issues, recognizing the distinct set of dilemmas that are posed by visual research. Ethics then becomes something more. Something complex and multi-layered that promotes reflection and re-assessments and this may be better labeled as an 'ethics of care' or alternatively an 'ethics of affect'.

### ***Ethics of Affect***

Pink (2015) suggests that within sensory ethnography it becomes difficult to separate out ethics from the very project itself. Where research is collaborative it becomes more ethical as participants are framed in a different way and are no longer the 'objects' of the research. Pink (2015: 68) suggests that 'such a collaborative and reflexive approach...is fundamental to sensory ethnography'. By engaging the participants you are seeking to engage with them on the project rather than seeing them as objects of the study. In my case it was interesting because I felt like the object was the classroom and school environment, and the young people were engaged in helping me to see this environment in a different way.

Pink goes on to argue that through a sensitive sensory awareness there is a moral perspective which seeks to make the world a better place. For example being sensitive to the way we design and appreciate our physical environment resonates with the literature on architectural atmospheres. This, then, is an ethical stance in hoping to improve the school environment. Pink (2015: 69) suggests that there is an implication that 'in applied research attention to the senses can lead to an appreciation of what is important in how people feel – the affective and sensory elements of – their social and material worlds'. Sensory ethnography is therefore well placed to develop novel approaches to research through inviting researchers to address the uncertainties and futures in ways beyond verbal expression and traditional notions of representation.



In moving towards autoethnography we find that ethical issues are further complicated. Roth (2009) recognizes that the responsibilities shift away from the individuals involved in the research, developing 'a responsibility for the Other, which both exceeds and is the same as the responsibility to Self.' In autoethnography the researcher is embedded even deeper into the research which throws up further problems, which are often subtle and unpredictable. Issues around what Ellis (2007) calls 'relational ethics' and links in with an 'ethics of care' or 'feminist ethics'. Here there is a call to be 'true to one's character and responsible for one's actions and their consequences on others (Slattery and Rapp, 2003: 55). The connectedness between the researcher and researched is emphasized with Ellis (2007) sharing her own personal experiences of getting things ethically wrong. This is because ethics goes far beyond the simple coding and so warrants a very dynamic moral questioning and openness.

Ellis (2007: 22) states that

'Just when I think I have a handle on a guiding principle about research with intimate others, on closer examination, my understanding unfurls into intricacies..., uniqueness, and relational and personal responsibilities of the particular case under question'

For example, in my project I have frequently justified the nature of the research films' jolts and the issues that it raises, stating that this mirrors my own shudders and jolts alongside my experiences of studying for an EdD. Ellis reminds me that there is an ethical issue of care towards those who view the film. They haven't necessarily volunteered to watch this film and I have to ask myself if it is ok for them to experience the affects of watching the film. It just brings these subtle issues to the surface and makes the ethical researcher more careful. I now ensure that I introduce the film in a certain way and help to prepare the audience that they may see something that they may not be expecting.

In thinking with new materialism, it leads me to question ethics for the non-human and indeed the spaces themselves. McCormack (2003), for example, evokes the nature of affect as 'in movement' which dictates that there is a very particular form of 'paying attention to'. In developing this there is a move towards an affective space of ethical sensibility, with McCormack drawing on Thrift (2004: 93) in stating that:

‘a new kind of ethics, one which is [...] characterized by an ethos of awareness, working experimentally upon virtualities that exceed the realm of conscious control. It is the cultivation of ‘expertise’ as judgement able to be fully attuned to each event rather than the application of a set of rules’

Whilst I am unsure about connotations of being able to be ‘fully attuned,’ I like the idea of ethics being something that surrounds the event rather than a simple set of codes around the individual. We end up with a dialogic ethics that is in a constant state of becoming. It has a time aspect in being able to look backwards and forwards at the same time, and is negotiated and re-negotiated repeatedly. This is naturally difficult to capture in institutional ethics practices, but is something that discursive research must attempt to enter into dialogue with.

## Core Contributions

In this chapter I explore the main contributions that the thesis makes to education and educational research, particularly in relation to theory and methodology. Specifically, I examine how educational research has been traditionally framed, showing how my methodological approach is positioned relative to this. I consider how research that cuts across disciplinary fields is relevant and briefly examine the challenges of inter-disciplinarity.

### ***Educational Research***

Within traditional educational research, the privileging of scientific approaches leads to a positivistic research position, which directly influences the interpretation of a possible social reality. In positivism, knowledge is viewed as hard, objective and tangible, and the research methods of natural sciences are adopted. Humans are usually framed as mechanical and determinable, 'as products of the environment, controlled like puppets' (Cohen et al., 2011: 6). Empiricism dominates, where theories or hypotheses are established which are verifiable by observation or direct experience. There is an emphasis on method, process and technique in order to discover 'what works' in practice, and the importance of methodology is reduced.

Education, which itself resisted becoming a 'social science', became scientised at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century during a phase of neo-positivist restoration (St Pierre, 2016). To aid this discussion I have selected one paper by Kamps *et al.*'s (2016), to illustrate key points and to position my own research against. I do not claim that this paper is typical, but it is used as an example of positivistic educational research. The study investigates the impact of a reading mastery intervention (synthetic phonics) for children in early years with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. There are many aspects that I could critique but I have chosen to discuss the use of a randomised control trial (RCT). RCTs seek to find causal relationships through assigning the study subject to two or more groups and treating them in exactly the same way, except for one variable. In Kamps *et al.* (2016) one group of children received the target intervention, and the 'control' received what they term 'usual instruction' in reading.

The use of RCTs indicates an assumption that there is such a thing as the 'average child'. It also suggests that people are comparable, and the social world is simplistic and controllable. Cohen *et al.* (2011: 66) suggest that RCTs neglect; participants' motives and motivations, the context in which the action is located, the moral agency of the participants and the ethics of the researchers. Whilst it is often considered the

‘gold standard’ research design, there are many people who reject RCTs and suggest they are inappropriate and misleading in social sciences (see Cartwright, 2007; Hammersley, 2015; Thomas, 2016). As Cohen *et al.* (2011: 9) state, ‘the immense complexity of human nature and the elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the natural world’.

Kamps *et al.* (2016) claim their reading intervention improves the attainment of children with Autism. It is an empirically grounded study which attempts to distil something complex (the teaching of reading) down to its essentials, with a tone of authenticity and scientific rigour. In a paper which claims that the intervention is effective, we find that the teachers had serious doubts about the pedagogy of the approach. The researchers have positioned themselves to be less interested in the experiences of the teachers and students, to instead focus objectively on one reading intervention. Not only does this de-professionalise the teachers, but it seriously undermines the research findings. The use of RCTs in education means that something is always absent, since the research design narrows the research questions that can be asked.

During the neo-positivist restoration, as mainstream qualitative research tightened up, positivism leaked in and flooded qualitative educational research. There was a sense of researchers avoiding taking risks with methodologies and withdrawing to the safe spaces of the readily accepted scientific methods. St Pierre (2014: 8) asserts that

‘the insistence that educational research should be ‘scientific’ so we could determine ‘what works’ in schools had reduced too much qualitative work to method and low-level technique and processes that produced too much pedestrian, insignificant work.’

This is what Maclure (2013) refers to as ‘lumpen empiricism,’ where there is a disconnect in the ways that theory and methodology are used as part of the qualitative inquiry, often with very little theorising. Habermas (1972) acknowledged that such approaches neglected hermeneutic, aesthetic, critical, moral, creative and other forms of knowledge.

Stewart labels the dominant discourse of positivism as ‘horrible social sciences’ to imply the banal focus on knowledge production and on only certain types of knowledge (Stewart, 2015: 121). Maclure *et al.* (2010: 544) recognise this when they suggest that educational research:

‘...frequently fails to interfere with this everyday banality of the normal child and thus unwittingly colludes with the production of exclusion, disadvantage and a stunted set of possible futures for children.’

This adds to the dominant clichéd position of educational research and the image of thought associated with it.

#### **Calm Zone**

**We have a calm zone where you can sit on the Astroturf and talk. The sign is there because people were fighting each other on the Astroturf. We have [set] days when you can go there. It can be really boring. If you needed to calm down on a different day you would have to sit on a bench or talk to a member of staff. Sometimes people say different things than the other person so [the adults] don't know which one to believe.**

#### **Student voices – interview data**

Over the last decade or so new educational research has emerged that rejects positivism and traditional qualitative research. The objective view of the world is replaced with ‘tentative speculation in which multiple perspectives are brought forward by the researcher; the world is multi-layered, able to tolerate multiple interpretations...and there exist multiple realities or knowledge is regarded as subjective rather than objective.’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2016: 27). It is avoiding what St Pierre

(2014) calls the ‘conventional qualitative research’ and instead aims to fold in theory and methodology with educational research.

One example is New Materialisms, where data is viewed in complex ways and objects and artefacts are regarded as texts, as discourses that are constructed and performed, and open to alternative meanings and interpretations (Francis, 2010: 312). This more critical approach, following post-modernism and post-structuralism, argues ‘against linear, deterministic, patterned, universalizability, stable, atomised, modernistic, objective, mechanist, control-led closed systems of low-like behaviour which may be operating in the laboratory which do not operate in the social world of education’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2016: 29). There is a desire to avoid what has already been thought and the preoccupation with method, to instead trust that ‘something in the world forces us to think’ (Deleuze, 1994: 139).

A core contribution of this thesis is therefore to experiment with theory and methodology in an attempt to think differently with atmospheres. As Manning (2016: 10), drawing on Bergson suggests, ‘a solvable problem was never really a problem.’

My research approach aims to generate movement and intensity by affecting the reader, hoping to create something new and original. In Deleuze and Guattari's words, it is through intensity in 'an encounter, a conjunction' (1994: 93) that thought comes to us. The thesis makes a contribution to new materialisms' methodologies and adds to a growing body of work that incorporates education as its context, including amongst others Somerville et al. (2015), Hackett, (2014) and Maclure (see 2013).

Through the process of producing 'creative stammerings' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 98) there is a desire to open up spaces within the research assemblage; a collage of materiality and event that makes up the thesis. Within these spaces we might produce an open, connectable map that shifts and reverses, rather than a fixed map of education. 'It can be drawn on a wall, conceived as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12). These maps do not recreate knowledge but rather perform and create new knowledge. This is the fertile 'research-creation' or 'radical empiricism' acknowledged by Manning (2016) that moves with the minor gesture rather than the major alignment of method. What therefore emerges with this minor gesture 'will never be an answer. What emerges will be patient experimentation...another mode of encounter, another opening onto the political as site as yet defined' (ibid: 13).

### ***Interdisciplinary Inquiry***

As discussed elsewhere, specifically the chapter 'Atmospheres: becoming' (pp13-19), research into 'atmospheres' tended to be located in disciplines outside education. Atmosphere was investigated in museum settings (Dorrian, 2014), the theatrical stage (Bohme, 1993), and in spaces coded to be atmospheric such as a football stadium (Edensor, 2015) or a street food market (Concha, 2015). Such diverse research fields, allowed me to take an interdisciplinary research approach, reflecting the increasing cross-disciplinary work within educational research.

Educational research, like all disciplines, has its own institutional and societal preferences. It is populated by of a group of professionals that produce a discursive community, whereby there are dominant worldviews, tools, methods and procedures (Greckhamer *et al.*, 2008). Each established discipline seeks to maintain and extend itself, rather than embodying contradictions or generating challenges (Clemens and Cook, 1999). Educational research has therefore been constricted, described by Wallin (2013: 198):

‘Regulated like zoo animals, teachers and students trace a deep rut at the threshold of their cages, habitually drawn back upon a course of life set out in advance. That is to say the curriculum-as-plan constitutes a ready-made territory that always already marks a threshold for what should be thought or produced pedagogically’

If we accept that this orthodoxy to educational research methods, theories and methodologies exists, as argued by St Pierre (2014), then we can ask, ‘what is missing?’ Applying theory to atmospheres within education implicitly demands an alternative approach, since traditional qualitative methods would insufficiently handle the complexities. In attempting to transcend the research deadlock of orthodox educational research I have worked across disciplines. What such inter-disciplinarity produces is a fluxing terrain where knowledge is difficult to pin down. Some research territories remain separate from others whilst some overlap and coalesce.

The problem is that I believe that there is too much emphasis on being boundaried, and the methodologies of this thesis have continually resisted becoming bounded in order to be open to new possibilities. Barthes (1977) argues that the breakdown and deconstruction of the disciplines leads to a new praxis of qualitative inquiry.

‘To do something interdisciplinary, it is not enough to use a “subject” (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists of creating a “new” object that belongs to no one’ (Barthes, cited in Clifford and Marcus, 1990: 1)

This is a risky business for myself as a novice researcher. It is commitment made at the start of the research journey and one that I was determined to maintain throughout. I became, in Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994) terminology, a ‘bricoleur’; a disciplinary frequent traveller creating and destroying bridges across territories. Embracing experimentation was something I became committed to. This bravery (or stupidity) in resisting the disciplining, is a core contribution of the work. I cannot conceive another way that I might research school atmospheres without using the theory, methods and methodologies that I have employed.

If a contribution to the research field is an incursion on educational research, then I need to briefly acknowledge that which I attack. As St Pierre (2014: 5) reminds us, ‘I don’t claim that the structure of humanist qualitative methodology is wrong or in error’. It is clear that more conventional educational research offers systems for organising



and assessing claims to knowledge, which are often desirable and needed. Certain research questions will demand a stability offered by the dominant methods of educational research. For example, there should be research that asks if a certain intervention in the classroom is effective or not, such as Kamps *et al.* (2016). There needs to be an answer to this type of question so that teachers have an understanding and there is some evidence-based practice. I make a similar point when discussing the use of coding of data, drawing on Maclure (2013) in the chapter entitled 'coding an atmosphere' (pp 129-132).

Individuals need supporting structures in order to cope with the constant changes in phenomena, and education is a rapidly evolving landscape. As such, I believe there is space for a whole raft of educational research types in the field. The problem is when certain types of research become privileged over others, and where method becomes the only thing that matters. We also need be aware of the assumptions around approaches such as RCTs and the type of research questions asked. In Kamps *et al.* (2016), the reading intervention could be investigated differently to understand more richly the processes and development of reading. It might focus on individual children and their engagement and response to the intervention, seeking to examine the situation through their eyes.

A core contribution of this research is therefore to attempt to think with educational issues that are complex, and to think with onto-epistemology as immanent to educational research. New Materialisms ultimately became a critical methodology for thinking with atmospheres in schools. Atmospheres and new materialisms became so entangled so that they are inseparable as a research approach. The thesis adds to a rapidly growing research field and I hope that the arts-based methodology and the radical empiricism used (which I explore in the next chapter) continue to open possibilities for future educational research. As Arendt (1968: 198) puts it, education is where:

‘we decide whether we love our children enough...not to strike from their hands the chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us.’

## Experimental tensions

### *Experimentation*

Experimentation is a core feature of this doctoral thesis. This section articulates the rationale for experimentation whilst recognising that it will never capture the processes and thoughts that led to the thesis' production. To pull the concept of 'experimentation', as though this is distinct and separate from the methodology and styles of presentation used, is artificial. I conceptualise 'experimentation' as a move away from traditional empiricism and the representational language associated with traditional humanist qualitative inquiry and positivism as described in the previous chapter. Experimentation is not a method but a concept that allows the opening of space, a fracturing of the norms, to allow something 'more-than' to enter the void.

I have frequently used the word 'assemblage' throughout the thesis without much exploration of meaning. Assemblage is drawn from the Deleuze-Guattarian term *agencement*, as in 'arrangement'. As a concept it is multi-faceted and relevant to experimentation. One facet is the *thinking* assemblage where linkages and connections are made in modes of thinking-knowing, in a nomadic movement (Dewsbury, 2011). An aim of the layout and organisation structure of the thesis forms a thinking assemblage which allows nomadic movement. Another aspect of the assemblage is about how individuals (subjects and objects) emerge in context and make connections with each other. This is particularly relevant in a study that uses new materialisms, as this assemblage offers a way to think with the flattened ontology of these methodologies. Atmosphere is 'becoming' rather than 'being'.

In terms of experimentation, assemblage-thinking opens alternative thoughts about the social world which encourages inventive and experimental ways of doing research. Assemblages give the thesis a possibility to work with new materialisms and to produce the flattened ontology that allows the author to work with affective school atmospheres. As such it is an antidote to the repression of traditional qualitative research:

'New assemblages of social research are clearly required to fit together all the ways in which the world is now characterised by flows, connections and becomings whose functioning logic is more about folds than structures, more complex than linear, more recursive than dialectical...' (Dewsbury, 2011: 149)

In returning to empiricism the concept of knowledge is rooted in experience. This is well-embedded in educational research which tends to be led by practice and methods-driven research. Deleuze and Foucault (1977: 206) recognised that theory and practice are inseparable when together they wrote that 'practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another'. As St Pierre (2012: 112) points out, this discourse 'distracts us from first attending to the onto-epistemological formations in which empirical practices are possible, and I think the rush to application is tripping us up as we try to do this "new" work'. Within this research my desire to avoid stumbling demanded a different type of empiricism.

A conventional framing of epistemology (the study of knowledge), can be separated into rational (where one thinks logically about knowledge and the world) and empirical (where one experiences knowledge and the world). A tension here is the way that research can be carried out without philosophy or indeed methodology being substantive. This framing is insufficient when researching atmospheres since they are not readily available for a conventional empirical analysis. In turning away from epistemology, ontology comes to the fore, which is the study of what is real or exists in the world. Drawing on Barad, this separation leads to binary ways of thinking that assume 'an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse' (Barad, 2007: 185). Ontology and epistemology become so entangled that it is no longer possible to separate them, leading to an 'onto-epistemological' stance, where one thinks of knowing in being. This leads to a position where knowing and being cannot be separated. We simply cannot stand at the rational edge and look in at the focus of the study. We cannot know a school atmosphere without being in it.

Deleuze offers an alternative direction to empiricism through his writings about 'transcendental empiricism' (1994) and 'radical empiricism' (1990). He was interested in the ways that real experience and specific phenomena might be generated without the human and the reliance on *a priori* categories that seek to recognise experience within the logic of representation. These factors are critically linked to the use of Deleuze's theories and concepts under the broad umbrella of new materialisms. As such, something like an atmosphere might be conceived as occurring for itself rather than in relation to the human or *a priori* categories. The movement in thought shifts from internal relations (a model of identity within the body) to external relations under different genetic conditions. According to DeLanda (2006) the relations of exteriority

are critical since they allow component parts of the assemblage to be unplugged and then inserted into a new assemblage. Whilst, an assemblage cannot be reduced to the components of its parts, a key aspect of the assemblage is therefore its heterogeneity. This allows the multiplicities of atmospheres to be part of the assemblage as they are conceived as complex, multifaceted, indeterminate and always becoming. Importantly these genetic conditions include movements, speed, and intensities that come together in the 'toss of the dice' never to return again (St Pierre, 2012). This leads me to suggest that atmospheres are only ever the genetic conditions positioned in relation to external things. Should this be the case, research requires an experimental approach which seeks to move whilst tuning into these genetic conditions.

Research under this 'radical empiricism' no longer searches for identifying what something is (what is atmosphere?) or to its genetic conditions (how is atmosphere possible?). Instead it becomes an open system interested in *pure differences* or ontological differences and these external relations and genetic conditions become unpredictable and unstable (how might we move and think with the becoming atmosphere?). Experimentation with atmospheres is one way that this is achieved. Pure differences and intensities exist according to Deleuze on an immanent 'transcendental field' (Deleuze, 2004: 98). Deleuze writing both alone and with Guattari, call this field, variously, 'the plane of immanence, plane of consistency, pure difference, body without organs, abstract machine and so on' (St Pierre, 2012: 119). This plane of immanence is therefore a pre-individual, pre-conscious, pre-conceptual, formless, depthless thing. It returns us to the thinking with the virtual and actual, with the plane of immanence a continuum of speeds, intensities, movement and forces of the virtual that has yet to become actual. The concepts of the virtual and actual become part of the radical empiricism and help us to conceptualise the atmospheres (see chapter 'Virtual and Actual Atmospheres', p.72)

Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 36) suggest that the purpose of philosophy is to create concepts and the 'laying out of a plane' to demand new ideas or ways of thinking. This thesis, through experimentation, attempts to exist on its own plane of immanence, a transcendental field in which the genetic conditions allow the individuation of individuals. 'An individual is any entity – consciousness, matter, a person, a concept, a time of day, a rose, weather, a flock of sheep, a landscape' (St Pierre, 2012: 120). Within this thesis the 'individual' oscillates between the author, the children, the atmosphere, the reader, the material and something unknown. The different forms of

writing and experimentation become a milieu designed to create something new. In the spirit of attempting to remain prior to subjects and objects, as pre-individual, it attempts to produce a nomadic wandering through atmospheres so that the reader themselves can create the new.

### ***The Affected Reader***

The Doctor of education course had a profound impact on the ways that I think and am. This began with a complete sense of discombobulation by initial readings which impacted on my identity. An early reading like Brown and Jones (2001) left me confused and unable to make sense of the complex vocabulary and I felt marginalised in my own non-sense. St Pierre (2014: 10) recognises this when she states that one 'must read and wrestle with the texts...[that] at first seem too hard to read and with ideas that may upend one's world.' As time progressed, terminologies became subsumed into my own lexicon and I began to appreciate texts without a need to fully understand them. There was a thrill in reading complex philosophies for the pleasure of it and trying to create my own meanings. From a sense of confusion, I found these stutterings to be productive and led to new ways of thinking. My onto-epistemological position shifted significantly as I began to view the world (and education) differently and became emancipated from my own self-doubt. Concerns around research validity, rigour, reliability and generalizability fell away as my paradigm slowly shifted.

Whilst simultaneously supervising Masters dissertation students, I noted that the majority of them shared my original starting position in having ontological and epistemological beliefs based around traditional educational research. Their research questions were driven by method or practice, with philosophy or methodology only ever a passing feature. Using complex texts and questioning, I disrupted students thinking around educational research, mirroring my EdD experience. These students went through very similar phases as I have described for myself, from initial confusion to new thinking to potential emancipation. They began to ask more ambitious research questions and engage with the complexity of philosophy and methodology. I began to see that being 'affected' and experimental might be a critical and productive part of 'doing research.' Research around 'atmospheres' also drew heavily on theories of affect and I became committed to working with affect in the thesis, drawing on arts-based visual methodologies.

The film was the first genre where ‘affect’ was a deliberate aim, as the communication style was different to the written form. The viewer is offered agency in interpreting meaning and the film is therefore imbued with affective potential. Through the selection of film clips, the editing process and the soundtrack, it was possible to create something new; an event. Ethically this was a tight-rope act, with a fine balance required. When I introduced the film, I made it explicit to the viewer that it might disruptive their thinking and produce affects. It was also risky since I no longer had control over the film and the ways that it would be understood. I acknowledge this in an early chapter (Dear Reader, p.8) where I suggest that the thesis involves a reading which invites immanent co-construction. By attempting to *affect* I wanted to afford the reader the thrill and intensity of generating something new, mirroring my EdD experience. I wondered if I could speak to the audience in different ways than traditional educational research.

### **Lines of Flight**

**Walking along the pavement today I found myself tuned into the imaginary pathways created as we walk. This had become jolted by the fact that I had almost bumped into somebody. Our intended paths had headed on a collision course and we had been unable to prevent this without slowing our movement. I realized how complex our intended pathways our – we continuously read the pavement ahead and make small adjustments. We read body language and complex social signals to help us to negotiate. It is amazing that more people don’t bump into each other, particularly on busy pavements in central Manchester. Our micro-movements and brain processing are massive parts of the minutiae of walking down the street. We can almost predict the future and play with time and space as we think about the spaces that other walkers intend to inhabit.**

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The experimental approach and different devices used (eg. styles of writing, images, cut-outs) became deliberate attempts to produce affect in the reader. These became ‘onto-epistemological judders’, which purposefully interrupt the flow, and allowed the reader to be an active part of the assemblage. It is hoped that these would vary the pace of reading, allowing pauses on the plateaus, allowing reflection on the affectiveness. Rather than these being explained or justified by the author, these became stylistic and deliberate moments on the *plane of immanence*. St Pierre (2014: 7) explains how this slowing down is important as it ‘reoriented my thinking about everything’. This is the intention of affecting the reader...in order for them to reorient themselves and their thinking, specifically in relation to education and atmospheres.

It was important to allow the text to speak to the reader and the reader to speak to the text as they plugged into each other. Since I conceptualised affect as a series of modalities, I became most interested in the pre-conscious side of affect – that which is most difficult to describe or locate. It is the beginning of the pure differences of the affect. The other modalities are around emotions and feelings. To me this is the fading part of the affect, its dying phase as it ceases to be. One tends to focus on the emotional/feeling aspect of affect as it is this which we are more able to articulate or capture. A commitment of this project to avoiding the logic of representation, meant that processes of articulation/capture were unimportant. As such it is not relevant whether the affect produced in the reader of the work is positive or negative since they are personal attributes, rather than pre-conscious. Furthermore, the reader does not even need to locate or describe these affects, because they are functioning at the pre-conscious level and can be located later in the emotional responses.

### ***Failure***

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'strata' is useful to think with the ways that experimentation and affect may fail. The risk is that once these things become actualised they become captured and normalised through the processes of 'stratification' – becoming ordinary (St Pierre, 2012). Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 13) describe strata as 'Layers, Belts. They consist of giving form to matters, of imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy'. One form of failure for this thesis is where the experimentation or affect get pulled into the strata. That is, they become pinned down and sedimented into place which prevents them from opening up new ways of being and thinking. The virtual becomes eroded at the expense of the actual (see Chapter 'Coding the Atmosphere, pp129-131). One of the aims of the thesis is therefore to 'blow apart strata, cut rocks, and make new connections' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:15).

If ever there is a manifesto for justifying the approach of this thesis, it is this long quotation:

'Precisely because the plane of immanence is pre-philosophical and does not immediately take effect with concepts, it implies a sort of groping experimentation and its layout resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable. These measures belong to the order of dream, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess. We head for the horizon, on the plane of immanence, and we return



with bloodshot eyes, yet they are the eyes of the mind.’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 41)

I like this ‘groping experimentation’ and ‘drunkenness’ as it implies an energy and direction. The desire to constantly reach for something new, although you might not always reach it, is evident. However, the experimental approach that I use is fraught with dangers. I believe there will always be aspects of the whole thesis that work better than others, whether or not these are shared by all readers. Even Deleuze acknowledges this: ‘according to Deleuze’s doctrine of chance-driven selection, there will be successes but also failures in his attempt to dramatise concepts, as well as to define and justify them’ (Williams, 2003: 85). Failure enters when the experimentation ceases and the thesis becomes stable and straightforward for the reader/viewer.

One further tension here is the way that the reader is positioned around affect. It is difficult to conceive of the ‘reader’, in similar ways that new materialisms resist the stable ‘I’. How does one speak to a reader who is at the same time not perceived as an ontological unit in themselves? Barad reminds us that there is an ‘entangled state of agencies’ (Barad, 2007: 23) which means that subjectivity, agency and the individual are difficult to locate. The individual is a mangled thing and the attempt to talk to the ‘reader’ is always a challenge, which some might consider as failure. The ‘reader’ is itself a conventional term, as are the voices and authenticities of them, so are open to criticism here. Rather than ‘plugging in’ the reader to the text, adding them to the thesis to construct knowledge from the chaos, I suggest it is better to see them as already part of the assemblage (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012). The reader is not separate from the text but were always already folded in. In other words, without the reader there is no text and the assemblage is incomplete. Affect remains important to this, but the reader views this from the middle rather than standing outside.

Researchers from a positivistic paradigm are likely to judge these claims around experimentation and the readers as a failure.

### ***Close Encounters of pages 87-107***

This close reading across twenty pages (pp87-107) of the thesis seek to illustrate the shifts within the assemblage and the transitions across the experimental styles. These pages have been selected as they offer a varied, representative section of the thesis on its line of flight across a variety of texts. This close reading gives an opportunity to reflect critically with this experimental approach, within a context of what might count as ‘failure’. This section does not aim to ‘trace’ these pages, since this would not be in

the spirit of my work, but rather to map the work. As Deleuze and Guattari explain (1987: 12),

‘what distinguishes the map from the tracing, is that [the map] is entirely oriented towards an experimentation in contact with the real.’

On page 87 the narrative story (‘Reaching a Plateau’) punctuates the body of the thesis. This chapter describes one of the main characters, ‘Cobain,’ a key protagonist in the story. Her dissatisfaction with the system she experiences offers an analogy for the school child who struggles against their system. Splitting the narrative story into chapters is a deliberate attempt to make the thesis nomadic and permits the reader to negotiate their reading journey. The narrative writing style is different to the more academic one used elsewhere and the boundaries between styles means a slight adjustment is required by the reader. They can then slow down and luxuriate within a story that might not usually be found in a doctoral thesis. At the same time the author also adds in this dystopian, alien world, so within this ‘comfort’ there is still a need for the reader to make sense of this different world. For example, the creatures who inhabit them and the mystical ‘totemicals’ are unfamiliar territory.

These boundaries are critical devices and in earlier drafts, where the narrative story remained intact, there was only the beginning and ending boundary. This became a failure of the work, and the author needed to rethink the narrative story. As a whole it also took the reader too far from the main thesis, causing the reader to become isolated on this strange island and unable to plug back into the whole. Through splitting the story into chapters and distributing them throughout the thesis, the author is able to increase the boundaries of the narrative of the thesis. The narrative’s surface area increases, which creates the onto-epistemological judders as the readers passes through these boundaries.

Drawing on de Freitas’s (2017) notion of ‘speculative fiction,’ the narrative attempts to show how fiction might allow social sciences to become unrecognisable. ‘Such work puts flesh on a thought experiment and does philosophy through character and story’ (de Freitas, 2017: 120). It is speculative in that what is produced is other worldly, somewhat familiar and yet quite strange. Fiction is fittingly able to attune to the non-human and treats matter as rich with agency. Whilst the current style of the narrative is emergent for the novice author, he considers it a useful method in thinking with the data for future research, perhaps where the writing can become even more unfamiliar.

Linking a narrative story with the data collected was a way for the author to continue to experiment with text. Dissatisfied with representation, he deliberately avoided presenting the voices of individual children directly in the thesis but distributed the voices in the narrative. This distorts the data, as Foucault (1980) suggests, to 'deform, [them], to make [them] groan and protest.' This mirrors the work by Jackson and Mazzei (2012: 6) who highlight that:

'The data were not centred or stabilised, but used as brief stopping points and continually transformed, and exceeded, as we used theory to turn the data into something different, and we used data to push theory to its limit'

Overall the aims of splitting up the chapters is achieved and I think this has been a successful device.

The narrative writing is also punctuated with images taken from the research film. By taking stills from the film and incorporating them into the narrative story, it allowed the two forms of data to interact and talk to each other. This was successful in avoiding the film being silenced within the written text. In this particular chapter the image shows the plastic food trays that the primary-aged children eat their lunch from. The film communicates the horror of the institutionalisation of lunchtime and the analogy with the 'prison' food tray. The message within this image seeks to echo and amplify the theme from the narrative. In this chapter Cobain wants to be an individual and wonders how she can resist the institutional discourses of her village life.

Finally, within this chapter there is also a large window cut out from each page of the text, revealing a photograph of an art-cloud by Berndnaut Smilde. When the author began to conceptualise their thesis, there was a desire to create it in three-dimensional form, like a map. Whilst a map is two-dimensional it is able to communicate the topography through the contour lines and the map reader is able to interpret this in three-dimensional form. The flat A4 paper seemed to limit this work. The cut-out window within this chapter begins the process of cutting across the dimensions of the thesis and communicates in a vertical, rather than horizontal form. It moves up and down through the thesis rather than simply across the page. It also serves to frame the image elevating its status within the piece, like framed artwork. The reader also gets a sense of its importance as the image is effectively repeated on each page, and this builds through time as the reader gets closer to the image page. The cut-out here last for 14 pages, so the repetition is significant, and the reader spends considerable time being able to view the image. A failure of the thesis would

be for these images to be viewed as an illustration, rather than a key message or argument in visual form.

The chapter ends on page 89 where the 'Logic of Atmospheres and Atmosphering' begins, and there is a clear style-boundary between these two chapters. This distinct chapter was written after a reading of Deleuze's 'Logic of Sense' (2004). It allows an exploration of language in connection with atmospheres as we return to notions of 'haunting' that were introduced earlier in the thesis. It focuses thinking on the non-materiality of atmospheres, to further blur what they may be, and overall it is successful in achieving this.

This chapter is also distinctive in that it features cut-outs at a word-level basis. These experimental devices were inspired by 'Tree of Codes' by Jonathan Safran Foer. The cut-outs, in the first instance begin to play with ideas of nonsense, whilst making the reading of the chapter more complex. As words appear in the cut-out windows it does not make any sense, unless you lift it or insert a blank paper behind. The cut-outs are a mutilation that open up the chapter to a vulnerability; one quick tug of the page and it will tear. It also forces the thesis as 'artefact' to have a physical form, at a time when they are submitted electronically. The cut-outs demand to be made in paper and that the thesis has a physical materiality, which is fitting within new materialisms.

Olafur Eliasson, an artist, writes in the foreword to 'Tree of Codes';

'To me, books have always been about more than just print on paper.

Tree of codes addresses the book as a space that relates to our body.

I look at the book as vibrant matter. It doesn't explain ideas but vibrates them. It embodies a space and a narrative – or various narratives – within it...' Eliasson (2010)

There is a clear influence of new materialisms in this comment, including the work of Jane Bennett (2010). My chapter hopes the cut-outs implicitly create a vibrancy or affect. A failure would be to view these cut-outs as a gimmick. Rather, behind each aspect of the experimental thesis are some specific thoughts, theories and actions; there is nothing accidental.

Up to this point in the thesis the reader will have adjusted to the flow of this chapter and will have negotiated their own method for reading with the cut-outs. At page 98 the next instalment of 'Reaching a Plateau' is reached and there is the required readjustment. A still image from the film is incorporated which depicts the coats hanging in the cloakroom, most of which are black and very similar. In the extended

film clip we see the children's bags are less homogenous, and include designs of various football teams, owl patterns, minecraft emblems, etc... This questions the need to conform and fit in, versus being an individual. This message relates directly to the chapter, where the decision for Cobain and River to escape from the village is reached. The image again is asked to do work against the narrative text, rather than simply make it visually pleasing.

The narrative story is continuously folded into what could be considered the 'main text'. The reader is similarly folded into the narrative and they become 'things' with their own machines. That is, they already have their own 'theories, data, methods, becomings.' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012: 4). The multiplicities of folds allow the narrative to become 'multiple, simultaneous and in flux' (Lather, 2007) as it is never fixed into position or into thought. The narrative attempts to support the reader and data into becoming, through repetition, allowing thoughts that not yet occurred. This permits the story to have its own life and agency. It is not about the author's thinking with the data as there is no 'correct' reading of the story. Instead the reader can offer their own interpretations and make their own meanings, which is a strength of the piece. There is no correct reading of the narrative story as educational research data. It recognises that all data is in flux; such as interview data which is 'partial, incomplete, and always being re-told and re-membered' (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012: 3)

At page 101 we arrive at the chapter entitled 'Critical Ethnography'. This relates how ethnography might be aligned with the research methods used as part of the thesis. One feature here is the reflective writing accounts that are written as columns within the main text. These were inspired by Julia Kristeva's 'Stabat Mater' (1985), where columns are used for contrasting styles of writing. The columns in the thesis represent the voices of either the researcher or the children co-researchers. They give an insight into the voices of those within the research assemblage that would be lost without them. The modalities of the different styles of writing in the columns and the main text, seek to create the stutters and judders that I have already described. Hawthorne describes the complexity of reading Kristeva:

'The split typography of "Stabat Mater" requires that a reader adopt a reading strategy to access its meaning; the necessity of this choice further occasions the performative elements of the text to come to the fore. Does one read the right column first and then the left? Does one attempt a

complicated synthesis of both columns at once? How does the text position the reader?’ (Hawthorne, 2013: 142)

In my writing the dialogic relationship between the columns is less certain than in Kristeva’s work. Sometimes there is this relationship and sometimes there isn’t. The reflective writing can sometimes be seen as doing the work for itself, rather than for the text it is positioned within. Overall, these pages seem to illustrate well the aim to experiment with text and the performativity as described by Hawthorne. As Holland (2013: 37) asserts:

‘the aim of the book-outside articulation or assemblage is not to represent the world as it is or what it means, but to survey and map its tendencies or becomings, for better or worse’

These concepts exist in the marriage of visual, textural and physical forms and ideas. It is a deliberate attempt to avoid the arborescent tree ‘image of thought’ and attempt a rhizomatic approach, moving along the multiplicities of random nodes. It is the ‘rebel becomings’ described by Maclure (2013). The non-conventional format allows the multiplicity to become a feature, yet this is not a superficial aim; an attempt to utilise Deleuzian concepts out of context. These should only be used when there is coherence between the research epistemology and empiricism. As St Pierre exemplifies (2012: 121), ‘using ‘rhizome’, a concept from transcendental empiricism, to ‘code data’, a conceptual practice of logical empiricism, just doesn’t work’. Similarly, the word assemblage is also frequently used without a fuller understanding of how this is conceptualised.

Rather, experimentation is a deliberate and purposeful methodological approach borne from a commitment to push thinking and theorising with atmospheres in schools to a more complex place. There will inevitably be highs and lows in terms of experimentation; successes and failures. At times the production of knowledge ‘...might emerge as a creation out of chaos’ (Grosz, 2008). This judgement of failure is a complex one and the tension within new materialism for who (or what) makes this judgment continually asserts itself.

## Reaching a Plateau

### Chapter 16: Topping Out

It was unclear how long they remained in the embrace, but the light was certainly fading fast. The sun was rapidly disappearing behind the horizon leaving an orange tint to the sky and enough light for them to reach the top. It was about half an hour later when they both were able to haul themselves over the final part of the climb and finally they could stand with all four of their limbs on solid ground.

What should have been a moment of elation, was tinged with so many other feelings. They had been the first to reach the Upper Lands, but this was at the expense of Glacial, who wouldn't be joining them. A fitting tribute perhaps was to bring the precious wood back to their farm. It was at this point that they stepped up to a loose boulder that would afford them an uninterrupted view across the Upper Lands. They jumped up as bats started to appear, flitting across the darkening skies. Both River and Cobain were once again speechless.

'It can't be,' River muttered under his breath.

Stretching out for several miles in front of them was the flat land that covered the whole of the plateau. Not a tree was in sight. A barren landscape lay in front of them, distinguished by a low scrub which looked like heather. Gaps in the peat land held small streams and rivers, feeding the waterfalls that they had already observed. But no trees.

'The hunters fable?' was all that Cobain could bring herself to say. Their mission was complete and yet their quest had failed. There were no words to describe how they felt. The atmosphere was heavy and subdued.

'What about the beauty?' River shouted across the plateau.

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**Still taken from Research Film**

Mohriza' of course had been transfixed by his telescopes and eye-glasses for the whole of the day. At this moment he was again unsure what exactly he should write in his notebooks. His old dilemma about how much he should have intervened again resurfaced. He had known for so long that the folk story that surrounded the Upper Lands was only a story. He wasn't sure why he had never shared this with the many Teveners he was on speaking terms with. It wasn't so much the fact that he had some scientific proof for even on this occasion this seemed irrelevant. Instead it was about hope. That was what had evaporated at that moment when the young Coosur had discovered the reality that the plateau held. Their faces were like nothing he had witnessed before. The horror of the Tevener's fall had already faded in significance. The events that had unfolded that day had served to undermine the whole belief systems that surrounded the island society. The final entry in his field notes, and the only entry for many years read as this:

'The loss of the 'special trees' and the knowledge that Sundara was now a more complex term, seriously questions the future of the island.'

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The Wisp was the only other witness that day, drifting silently around the plateau throughout the day. He was perhaps the only one to find some joy in these events, for The Wisp had dwelled on these islands long before the Coosur and Tevener, and hoped he would be there for a long time into the future. He lived within a different timescale to all the others.

As hope for the islanders seemed to collapse, and their construction of 'beauty' became questionable, The Wisp thought about this in a different way. Perhaps now they would be able to appreciate the beauty that surrounded them and always had done. Perhaps they would be able to desist in their competition to create the finest totemical. If they could shift their focus away from finding the 'best, there would be no further need for the deforestation of the island, and this precious ecosystem could be saved. As he summoned in the storm clouds, he wondered if this would be the last time he attempted to wipe the island clean. The large raindrops hit the ground with a heavy thud as they began to gather pace.

## Signs of Atmospheres

There are no overarching set of laws or rules that cover relations between different levels of syntheses. Rather there are 'signs' of others. Pausing for a moment here, it is worth thinking more deeply with these signs. The first point is to think of the signs in relation to heterogeneous things. As such the idea of a causal relationship is diminished. In other words, the signs do not exist in order to create changes in other bodies. The signs also help us to address states of change rather than leading us to represent things. Thus, I suggest the signs of an atmosphere are the 'affective aspects' of atmosphere, which is my focus. Here the reader engages with-affect to consider the relations within an educational setting, rather than attempting to explain it. I believe the signs (of an affective atmosphere) defy representation and conceptualization.

Williams (2003: 91) suggests that the sign also 'disappears when we try to *know it* as opposed to letting it work through us'. As such the quest to adequately define a school atmosphere should be abandoned, since it is a futile task. One may then ask, 'who is the atmosphere then for?' and the answer comes again from Deleuze in seeing the difference (in repetition) occurring 'for itself'. There is no repetition of the same thing for any other thing – merely the variations that occur with the individual. The atmosphere may then be thought of as a sign operating through bodies and matter by means of its sensations. After all, the identity of atmosphere is always becoming and always illusory. As such the perceived atmosphere seeks only to atmosphere itself.

Deleuze communicates this by saying that the signs are not for someone else, but are within the individual. This renders the sign as something worthy of experimentation rather than something which has a correct reading or interpretation. This sense of the sign as something dynamic fits well with my thinking with atmospheres, where something intense goes through processes of reciprocal determination as it oscillates between the elements of the *actual* atmosphere and the *virtual* atmosphere. What schools should avoid is using imitation to try to manufacture a certain type of atmosphere, since it is out of sync with the movements and intensities of the pre-existing atmosphere. By this I mean that there should be resistance to the school ethos and mission statements that seem relatively homogenous between schools, as though imitating each other is

desirable. The first step for schools to work with atmospheres is to cease the quest to describe it.

The concept of *multiplicities* is useful in drawing the multiple facets of Deleuzian thinking together as part of his work *Difference and Repetition* (1994), since Deleuze considers everything to be a multiplicity. A simple definition of this is naturally resisted, but it can be thought of as a continuous function, which according to Spivak, (1967: 93) is a function with no 'breaks, or jumps or wild oscillations'. For example, the function of 'this room has an atmosphere, while this one does not' has a break at the point when we move from room to room. Yet we can posit that such a boundary does not exist and there is a flow between the different spaces. Indeed Deleuze suggests that the absence of a break is important in allowing ideas to be thought of as multiplicities; that is something 'not fully captured if they are thought of in terms of significant breaks or approximated to fixed, identifiable values' (Williams, 2003: 146).

#### Crash Site

**Today I drove from my office to a local shop. Without thinking I found myself at the location of a roundabout where I had had my only (minor) car crash. I was staggered that the affective power of this location was so great since the crash has occurred 22 years ago! I found myself waiting at the give way sign looking at the specific place where my car had spun round. I could remember the confusion of finding my car pointing in the wrong direction and questioning why the engine was no longer running. I was still affected after all this time. I found that rather than driving forwards into the space of the roundabout I was pausing and being over-cautious. Affect seemed able to have its own agency and is able to cling to spaces. This affect was very personal, able to play with me as the human and the space as the nonhuman.**

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The idea of the multiplicity becomes useful in relation to atmospheres, due to the inherent structure of the multiplicity. These include the idea of something in a constant state of variation being resistant to identification; relations between these elements; relations between these relations and actual relations; and relations between the elements and actual forms and ideas.

I agree with Williams when he states that 'this definition is critical for Deleuze's work since the definition of the 'Idea' is a stage of the trail of arguments and definitions that leads back to the definition of pure differences and forward to his

definition of the virtual and the actual in terms of intensities. The elements of Ideas are pure differences' (Williams, 2003: 146). Here the totality of Ideas and intensities is the 'virtual'. Actual things are embodied and presuppose the Ideas and their pure differences, being mediated through their very intensities. The Idea and intensity of the atmosphere therefore feeds the notion of the virtual atmosphere, while the actual atmosphere remains a set of intensities, even if with my example it resists embodiment.

According to Deleuze 'language does not operate between something seen (or felt) and something said, but always goes from saying to saying' (2004: 89). As such there are many passions in passion, multiple voices within a voice and indeed, for me, all manners of atmospheres within an atmosphere – suggesting that language aligns with an indirect discourse. I have always been conscious within this thesis that language would always have a part to play in terms of defining exactly what a thesis is, as I have explored elsewhere. This draws upon Deleuze's (2004) point that language serves to be obeyed rather than believed. It is not benign and the power of the language itself serves to include and exclude. These moral and ethical aspects of my work have always been present and pragmatic decisions have been made in relation to these – including choosing film as the main medium of data from children, incorporating visual methodologies in order to disrupt language and a queering of the very notion of how a thesis may be conceptualized and structured.

However, whilst these acts are important I should note that the slippage to language always occurs. Indeed, most of the thesis is in written form and therefore reinforces the obedience of language that it claims to resist. My hope is that my passions and the affective aspects of the whole thesis are able to give an intensity and Otherness to this language. That the different styles of writing contribute to a diffracting assemblage that seeks to jar with the usual narrative arguments and claims that a traditional doctoral thesis may attempt to make. As Deleuze also recognizes, some of these attempts to dramatize the language will be successful, but at other times will not. However, I am willing to take these risks of failure though hoping that there will be some successes along the way.

With language there is a need to think about a 'body' in its broadest sense (there are actual bodies, bodies of a movement, souls are bodies...etc.). According to Deleuze there is a need to 'distinguish between actions and passions affecting those bodies, and acts, which are only non-corporeal attributes or the 'expressed' of a statement' (Deleuze, 2004: 93). As such there is a complexity to all bodies and I am particularly interested in bodies that are affected or affecting. Deleuze gives an example to illustrate this:

'In an airplane hijacking, the threat of a hijacker brandishing a revolver is obviously an action; so is the execution of the hostages if it occurs. But the transformation of the passengers into hostages, and of the plane-body into a prison-body, is an instantaneous incorporeal transformation, a 'mass media act' in the sense in which the English speak of 'speech acts'

Deleuze (2004: 94)

What has been missing from this thesis so far is a sense that the school and classrooms themselves function as their own body. My notions of singularity have tended to refer to the subject/objects and human/nonhuman within these contexts without explicitly allowing the assemblage to include the spaces and places themselves. Drawing in the idea of the 'incorporeal transformation' is helpful in relating the ways that the language of schools, from the policy and curriculum levels to the everyday institution practice level, serves to change the very space. The body of the classroom could therefore become a prison-body for the child who may have significant barriers to learning framing them as a problem-body. Similarly, the library may become a heaven-body for a child who loves books and reading. What is crucial here is that there is not a physical change in that space but an incorporeal transformation of/for affecting bodies.

Deleuze helps me to further understand how language itself relates to the arguments around non-representation, that I have repeatedly made. He is able to express the act of writing as simply a part of a larger assemblage, whilst showing the intricacies and beauty of being able to express in the written form. He discusses this form of expression in relation to the *event* whilst capturing the fact that something always evades the written language itself. 'When knife

cuts flesh, when food or poison spreads through the body, when a drop of wine falls into water, there is an intermingling of bodies; but the statements “the knife is cutting the flesh,” “I am eating,” “the water is turning red, “express incorporeal transformations of an entirely different nature’ (Deleuze, 2004: 100). Something will always then be missing from this research thesis.

He suggests that all bodies have proper qualities, actions, passions and souls. In terms of representation it is clear that he thinks of this as an actual body itself. But the power lies in not trying to represent the body, even when there are grounds to make the distinction between incorporeal expressed ‘the oppressive atmosphere’ and the corporeal quality ‘the cramped space’. Rather than represent things he suggests that we ‘anticipate them or move them back, slow them down or speed them up, separate or combine them, delimit them in a different way’ (Deleuze, 2004: 101). There is a productivity in thinking with the Deleuzian *return* and ‘differing speeds’ in my future research.



## Voice

A significant tension within the writing of this thesis is the positioning of voice, particularly that of the author and children, against the approach of new materialisms and radical empiricism. How can we recognise the humanist voice in a project dedicated to transcending this rational thinking? Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have offered a new ontology that questions whether the starting point for research should be the individual human beings.

My argument around voice is located with earlier points about the ways that conventional qualitative research utilizes a specific type of empiricism and allows itself to be led by method rather than concept. With conventional method the voice and the 'I' are located and static, as the voice has a foundation, with an individual who is recognized as real and meaningful. Drawing on St Pierre's moves towards post-qualitative inquiry, Deleuzian thinking allow concepts such as voice to be deconstructed as 'methodology in the fold' (St Pierre, 2014: 7). This involves an active move away from research that is led by procedures done during 'fieldwork' (eg. interview, participant observation, questionnaires) to elevate 'concept as method'. This then permits a process of slowing down and reorienting thinking around this new ontology, one that sees the world differently. Deleuze is not interested in the self-conscious, familiar 'I', but rather sees the subjects as a series of complex processes. Williams (2003: 6) summarises this well; 'the individual is a series of processes that connect actual things, thoughts and sensations to the pure intensities and ideas implied by them.'

The problem with conventional voice in qualitative research, and particularly in the social science, is that it has been privileged as a true and authentic form of data and evidence. Voice is pre-discursive and therefore appears to speak the 'truth.' For research within new materialisms this has to be problematic as we question this 'conscious, usable, unified, rational, coherent, knowing, autonomous, and ahistoric individual' (St Pierre, 2009: 221). St Pierre goes on to suggest that what is needed is for voice to be put in its place, to be reduced from its lofty position and instead be seen as simply one part of data amongst many. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) 'radical ontology' helps to locate voice on a flatter singular plane. A new materialist approach that reduces objects and subjects to a singularity would argue that if agency becomes distributed, then so should voice. Mazzei (2016: 152) sees

‘voice as [not] attached to *an* individual (be that individual theorized as coherent and stable *or* fragmented and becoming). This is not a voice that “breaks habits” in relation to subjectivity. This is *a voice of a subject*, still “there” to search for, retrieve, and liberate.’ A move from ‘*a*’ voice, or indeed ‘*my*’ voice to: only voice.

This issue has been a challenge and tension throughout the research, as remaining with concepts and theory is difficult, and slippage inevitably occurs. This creates the space for the rational human voice to (re)appear as method rises to the surface. Particularly at the beginning of the research, the personal reflective writing seemed to be an important outlet for the author’s thinking, and as the methodology was at an early development stage, this was not problematic. As the writing progressed, inspired by Kristeva (1985), there was an experimentation with different genres of voices, placing them in columns alongside each other to turn this juxtaposition into something productive. The tension remained that my voice, as author, remained throughout the piece with some forms of data shouting it louder than others. Lather and St Pierre (2013) recognise this problem in stating ‘if we give up ‘human’ as separate from non-human, how do we exist? Can there be an instituting ‘I’ left to inquire, to know? Dare we give up that ‘I,’ that fiction – the doer before the deed’ (631).

Thinking with presence, alongside voice, is useful as these exist as similar concepts of qualitative inquiry. Derrida (1974: 60) suggested that experience is a metaphysical construct that ‘has always designated the relationship with a presence’. In other words, we can think differently with the relationship the individual human has with both voice and experience. Scott suggests ‘it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (before seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced’ (Scott, 1992: 25-26). Here it is not the individual that experiences and explains, but the experience that writes and explains the individual. This supports my later attempts to remain with the pre-personal, what Scott calls the ‘authoritative evidence’, since it is within that moment and resists voicing. This parallels the attempts to think with ‘atmospheres’ as voice becomes about modalities in a very similar way.

In returning to the slippage mentioned earlier, St Pierre (2009) reminds us that until this moment she thought she was essentially real. In disrupting notions of voice and presence then we must disrupt the conceptual order of metaphysics. She states

‘it had never occurred to me that I was a very real ‘effect of a description’, that I was living my life and producing myself, others (and the world) according to someone’s description, and that there had been through the centuries of the past and would be through the centuries of the future other descriptions of the person, the individual, the subject, whatever signifier we choose...any structure – the subject, qualitative inquiry, science – [is] a description that can, has been, and will be rewritten with more or less ease’ (St Pierre, 2009: 229).

This long quote beautifully captures the sense of past-future movement around this thinking, and the temporality that exists around presence and voice. This helps to also reduce the status of voice from ‘truth’ to merely part of the event.

Despite these new ways to think with voice, St Pierre also acknowledges that to escape ‘I’ is impossible. I struggle to abandon the ‘I’ (me) in this thesis, and only adds to the tensions and this is linked to the inability to escape the Cartesian *cogito*. That is, drawing on Descartes the concept of the proof of self (I exist). To escape the human being of humanism St Pierre (2014: 15) suggests multiple alternate modes of thinking. What resonates for this research is the suggestion from Deleuze and Guattari (1994: 105) that ‘I is [merely] a habit.’

### ***Voice as remnant***

In thinking with voice in qualitative research, we have at one end a rational human subject able to express experience with research accepting this as a true version of events and able to act as evidence. At the other end we have a voice not within the subject and not fully present in the moment. This is an ontological voice that adds data to the research whilst always being discursive and unstable. Looking back on the thesis it is now clearer that a range of voices oscillate on this spectrum of voice I have just described. What is problematic is that patches of rational human voice seem to jar within a thesis that claims to be built on new materialisms.

One reason that this has occurred is that the writing and research has been emerging over several years. At the very early stages of the project I had not conceptualised new materialisms or indeed 'voice' since I was not at a stage to be able think like this. Instead I had simply grappled with ways to produce knowledge differently in a project committed to exploring affective atmospheres. The other reason is linked to the impossibility of escaping 'I'. The process of learning through a taught professional doctorate had always been a personal experience. It was 'I' who attended taught weekends, 'I' who grappled with complex texts, 'I' who received feedback on assignments, 'I' that generated the work to produce a thesis. I was always present. I couldn't conceive how I might write this project whilst remaining voiceless within it, nor did I particularly want to.

Having now thought more deeply around the discussions of voice I can now conceptualise it differently. Rather than re-write the whole thesis I was satisfied to recognise the remnants of earlier thinking with voice and allow them to remain within the whole. This writing then serves to mark the positions taken through time around voice. As such they then act as jarring devices that explore how disruptions in the flow and conceptualisation of writing might contribute to the overall affect of the thesis. They become part of the history of the writing; a remnant voice.

### ***Voice as distributed***

If we are able to think with a more-than voice, there is an alignment with some of the written genres used in the thesis. Mazzei opens this door by suggesting that voice may not belong to the individual but rather be a voice 'as an enactment of forces and not all necessarily human. Voice that produces 'being in its becoming' (Mazzei, 2016: 153). There is evidence of this becoming-voice throughout the thesis.

The encounters that I write about in my own voice should be considered with other voices as they are 'entangled with other materialities, which, in humanism, are referred to as "lived experiences" but which I call here body without organs (voice without organs?) to resist an essentialising of experience and voice, or a fixing of time as a series of instants' (Mazzei, 2016: 155). It therefore becomes necessary to think with the personal writing according to multiplicities of identities. It is an entanglement of 'I' and others; the voice of a parent, the owner of a pet, a child, a

teacher educator, a holiday-maker etc.... The plane of immanence allows the singularity of voice to become more-than simply the authors. It allows voice to move into the virtual realm, rather than it being thought of as an actual voice. In this virtuality we can think more-than voice. More than what the words communicate and of concepts like truth and evidence. Instead the virtual voice allows its traits, habits, movements and affects to be noticed as the voice moves to become a collectivity. The forces of all bodies then leave behind the humanist voice – one that is bound to a specific body – and voice becomes a distributed immanent force. Mazzei (2016: 154) posits that ‘voice in the new, voice without a subject, unbounded voice, is again, not a thing but a process of couplings and connections of different bodies, places, spaces, times, utterances, and becomings’.

#### **Individuality**

**We are all valued in this school and treated the same. If someone joins our school everybody says that ‘they are welcome!’ We are a big family and all mix together. We are all different, but we are all like good at different things. You don’t have to be what people think you need to be. We all drew butterflies for the display to show that each is different. The Rainbow fish reminds us to be individuals. And our school symbol is a rainbow.**

#### **Student voices – interview data**

This productive shift may be difficult to achieve with the reader since there is a bogging down of ‘life’s potentiality for connection, creation, mutation, deflection and becoming becomes limited by an image through which we perceive all other images’ (Colebrook, 2006: 141). As such the risk is that the reader attempts to attach meaning to the voice and the actors within the thesis. For the ‘child voice’ in the film and the reflective journal

entries, the author negotiates this by making voice a collectivity. These are multiple voices (several children) present in each moment, with none attributed to an individual. This is not to reduce their power of voice but the opposite – to locate them on the plane of immanence and allow their voice to transcend a simple, narrowed meaning. It allows the reader to move with the more-than voice and detect more than what is actually said.

For the author, the process becomes about de-centering and quietening the rational ‘I’ voice and distributing the remnants of voice. This shift starts to emerge through an experimentation with personal writing in the third person. These cease to be *my* memories and become simply memories. This works within this context because most adults that read the thesis are likely to have experienced the UK

education system allowing a resonance between their own memories and the ones here. The narrative writing also permits the authors voice to be distributed amongst the characters. These characters are also metaphors for collective agents within the research (eg. children, teachers, researchers, policy makers) rather than really being individual voices.

### ***Voices as minor moments***

Manning (2016) posits that the minor gesture serves to disrupt and destabilise the 'I' that is found in the movement of the event. The 'I' is always reduced to the same significance as all matter and therefore in many ways it is just a regulative fiction. 'It just means that the 'I' cannot be located in advance of the event, that the 'I' is always in the midst, active in the relational field as one of the vectors of the in-act of experience. 'I am' is always, to a large degree, 'was that me?' (Manning, 2016: 37). The minor gesture is a productive force, which serves to open up experience and action to the virtual. It sits in opposition to the major gesture which in this case might be the rational human voice, but might also include the political (school policy, Ofsted) voices. The minor gesture is always in movement, as Manning reminds us, '[it] is defined by its capacity to vary...For the gesture is only a minor gesture...insofar as it creates the conditions for a different ecology of time, space, of politics...This is its force...its call for freedom (Ibid, 2016: 23-24).

Within this shifting ecology I can act as if I am me, I do have a voice, but only for the time being. Thus, when the voice of the author asserts itself in the thesis, it can immediately be pressed back to the plane of immanence as an ontological voice. Once uttered or written it immediately disappears. The thesis then can use art, voice, experimentation to cleave the experiences of affective atmospheres. Voices are then only one part of the attempt to generate new modes of knowing, of feeling, of acting, in the context of schools. This is achieved through an unsettling of the norms through which materiality, including subjects, come to be known. If the minor moments within this thesis have created a specific ecology, then the reader is required to recalibrate during their reading. Their voice (and thinking) cannot necessarily remain as stable and fixed if it wants to move with the new materialisms. The reader's voice gets added into the milieu as they join the movements. According to Manning, drawing on Deleuze, 'artfulness always calls forth a people to come'. This aspect of timing captures the final point in relation to voice within this thesis.

Mazzei's work on research voice is a critical contribution to the discussions on voice in qualitative inquiry with the new materialisms. It involves a radical shift in the way that we think with inquiry and how we learn to forget habits and move towards the middle; inquiry that is becoming. As she states 'the 'narratives' that I envision are of the collective assemblages of enunciation, not a product of individual statements, or people, or pasts, but of duration and becomings' (Mazzei, 2016: 159). Whilst the thesis is written in text and words, the voice should be conceptualised in the same manner as the atmosphere. Voice can then be seen as a haunting or troubling that serves to create stops and jolts as they play against the past. To return to Stewart, voice might be 'defined by their capacity to affect and to be affected' (Stewart, 2007: 4).

'In returning to becoming-voice and the concept of duration, these lines of articulation do not narrate a past or an experience, they present the past in an entanglement of bodies, histories, classrooms, spaces, accents, futures, clothing, coal dust, wordings, and other bodies both human and non-human that exist on the same plane, neither necessarily preceding the other, all producing material effects, rupturing notion of the subject and time'

(Mazzei, 2016: 159)

This beautiful sentence is a suitable way to end this section. It is an unexpected position to be in; to begin to critically think with voice against this thesis to ultimately return to the methodologies that have driven the whole beast forward. To begin to shift voice from the conventional and resist the traditional use of voice in qualitative inquiry, and radically move towards an ontological collective voice concerned with affect.



# Reaching a Plateau

## Chapter 17: ...Years later

*'...the dream of approaching the ordinary lives only in the moment of its surge – in the resonance of the still life or the practice of the perfectly manicured lawn. Left to its own devices, it undoes itself through its own excess'*

(Stewart, 2007: 56)

A sea breeze blew towards the island. The rotting huts lay desolate, the vines consuming some of them completely. Some of the totemicals lay on their sides, yet the rest stood proud looking out to sea. Some leaned at jaunty angles but were so far resisting the pull of gravity. The painted markings were faded and peeling, but it was still possible to see the teeth marks that had lovingly carved these great symbolic pieces.

Most of the villages had long since been abandoned and this once thriving island held fewer than 50 inhabitants. Amongst the buildings lay a huge bubble which indicated some sign of life. A metal chimney gave an indication of life, as the smoke poured from the spout and rose into the sky. The heavy canvas material had been pulled into a dome shape and around there were courgette, strawberry and other food plants being carefully cultivated. It was clear that everything here was valuable and recycled. A wing like structure functioning as a complex rain water collecting system. An ancient telescope stoop proud, atop a small flag, acting like a weather vane. A house sign hung from the door, an old plank with the painted word 'Sundara' clearly visible.

Mohriza could never leave the island. This had become his life's work and his emotional attachment was too strong. With some irony, he was perhaps now the oldest person to live on the island and this offered him some status within the small community. No longer was he the outsider. He couldn't remember the last time he had written in one of his field books. Probably during the months of exodus, when the Teveners and Coosur had been unable to maintain the status quo. These tomes still lined his bookshelves but perhaps being a land dweller had changed things. He certainly couldn't remember which order they were in now or where he would find certain entries or specific stories. The biggest thing that he

had learnt over the years was how dynamic and flexible the world was. 'Things change so quickly' he would repeat to himself as he watered and tended his garden.

Naturally, Mohriza would never be the oldest person to reside on these precious islands. The Wisp floated graciously through one of the oldest forests that covered part of the island. Hope and beauty were returning here. The desolate lunar landscape was slowly changing. He floated around the stump of a tree to note the four shoots that were growing rapidly upwards, and had already reached a metre in height. In other parts, trees were naturally claiming this land and he felt confident that in a few years they could call this woodland once again. Diversity was the key here and the old monoculture that had existed to make the totemicals was now history. The regular rainfall was playing its own part in the regeneration, which wasn't just a coincidence. The Wisp also noted how the Upper Lands themselves were also changing. This was at a much slower pace than the rest of the island but perhaps this is what would be called progress. An environmental progress that was quite the opposite of the traditional forms of industrial progress. The Wisp couldn't help but glow more brightly as he surveyed the scene. Beauty was returning.

The small ferry boat approached the only deeper water port of the island. It was now a weekly run and what started in an ad hoc way, was now a popular and packed excursion to the islands. It wasn't clear how much these visitors actually saw, as much of the time they were looking through their smartphones or long camera lenses. River noted that the more money these tourists had, the longer their lenses tended to be, as though they were some kind of status symbol. The ropes were thrown onto the jetty and securely tied. He knew that for the next few hours he would be photographed and studied but it was the least of his worries now. River wanted only a quiet life as he lay chewing methodically on an old log, his young children jumping on his back inviting him to play. Cobain watched them from a distance as she lay in the shade. Feelings had never particularly been her thing as she needed to protect herself, but she understood what contentment felt like. She wanted to freeze that scene forever, if she possibly could, so she attempted to drink in every part of her family. The multisensory; the smells and sounds, the picture itself and the auras and feelings that were associated with it all. Time was suspended within that precious moment.

Further away in the distance, she watched the tourists herded into smaller groups where they would be given a guided tour of parts of the island. Cobain hadn't been sure how the narrative that these visitors were given had been created. Certainly nobody had spoken with them, nor consulted Mohriza, whom the remaining islanders considered their own personal chronicler. There was only one thing that they had come to see and that was obviously the totemicals.

The humans were desperate to see and photograph these. Leaving the small gift shop with tiny replicas and magnets by the bag full. They just couldn't get enough. Perhaps the true story that lay behind the totemicals was too much for them to take in. A cleansed, fabricated version of the story offered something more palatable. It was certainly more marketable as an opportunity to make money although it wasn't clear how much of these funds would return to the island itself.

Cobain regarded the totemicals with a sense of pride mixed with sadness. It was a part of her history that couldn't be erased. Yet at the same time they symbolized competition and despair, the end of the old way of existing on the island. She was realizing that nothing was ever perfect, and she was certain her own children would find their own ways of rebelling and resisting the ways of their elders. Some of the 'old ways' she missed, but there was something exciting about finding a new way to live and thrive. They had lived through the exodus but perhaps the easiest decision they had ever made was that they would remain on the island. The



**Still taken from Research Film**

biggest thing that Cobain had learnt was to live in the moment and to enjoy the everyday things in their lives.

For the tourists, the totemicals were a beautiful work of art. Something unique to this island and their cleansed story spoke of a happy island where totemical

carving was just a natural past time. No mention of the unsustainability and the problems they caused. No acknowledgment of how the totemicals had nearly destroyed the whole island. Simply beautiful works of art. And that was often how history worked. Things would change or be cleansed as another work of fiction was created. But regrets themselves could be destructive and it was time to move onwards. The eager visitors could see the craftsmanship and love that had gone into making the tall crafted poles. This was at least something that Cobain could not argue with.

## School Constellations

“...if we think we know what is already out there, we will almost surely miss much of it”

(Bennett, 2010: XV)

I have always been drawn to Bennett's conceptions of vibrant matter (her thing-power debris) and the way that the nonhuman assemblages may interact with their environment and human matter. In the next section I have attempted to consider data and thoughts that emerged from the completed film, and ways that these may interact with a possible atmosphere. The tension that has existed here has been the risk of slipping into a representational description of atmospheres and schools that would be reductive and not in the spirit of this dissertation. Bennett's quote above serves as a reminder of the need to be tentative and open in tone, which befits such a complex and uncertain nature of a potential atmosphere. Using Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of assemblages I consider the ways that some of the film data may become coded, stratified and territorialised by the research film.

**Assemblage I: “The metal iron railings, the locked doors and the fire hydrant.”**



A particular door was opened by the research film on which is written 'safety'. This feeling of being safe is something that schools seem to think is important and this discourse has become embedded within education. From a child's perspective some themes emerged from the data in relation to safety.

The first is a sense that the iron, prison bars around the school are completely necessary and because these are there one must be completely safe. The green painted metal was a physical manifestation of what safe looks like. As well as keeping 'the bad people' away from the school the school prison is also able to contain. This prevents 'all the children from running home at lunchtime'. The vibrancy of parts of this assemblage spoke to the children and gave them an affective sense of physical safety. Yet for me the message from reviewing the raw film footage was that of prison. A negative sense that schools had to keep the children in and the bad people out seems crude and belittles any complex meaning or discussions with children to explore notions of 'safety'. My mind returns to the Victorian primary school playground with the small walls that surrounded the playground. The railings has never been replaced since the metal was used during the war. When the football went over the wall we were able to collect it by jumping over. The whole place was open to the public walking by, and yet I never had a sense of feeling unsafe.

***He runs his fingers along the metal bars feeling the radiating warm reflecting back at him. As the digits bang against each bar the dull echo sounds and the mind wonders, closing off the background noise of the others playing. The screams and shouts become muffled. In parts the paint has chipped and reveals the older colour of dark red. He knows where these are and avoids scratching his fingers. He has known this fence for so long, studying its surface during quieter moments, it feels part of him.***

This raises interesting questions also about the type of work we do with children and young people today to explore the topic of safety. How we might extend the idea of safety away from just this crude physical sense to encompass our emotional safety? We might consider the ways that we would respond if we found ourselves in a situation that we felt unsafe. We may think about the ways that



schools would make teaching and learning 'safe' where learners might take risks and be creative.

On the other hand it was also communicated through discussions with one child that the fire extinguisher that hung on the wall next to her classroom meant that there was a possibility that there could be a fire. Actually it did the opposite of what it aimed to do, by actually making her feel unsafe (there wouldn't be a need for a fire extinguisher if there was never going to be a fire). Its *kiss of death* suggests that the fire will come, and the large red cylinder enacted this fact on a daily basis...a visual cue for an impending fire.

### **School Signs**

**The sign 'we love reading' encourages children to read. Some people who don't like reading might see that others have feelings towards reading. It is to persuade you to start reading and think it is 'cool', but everybody has their own opinion on it. Overall, you stick true to these signs.**

**They don't make us want to read. They are just signs that we read and laugh at.**

**Student voices – interview data**

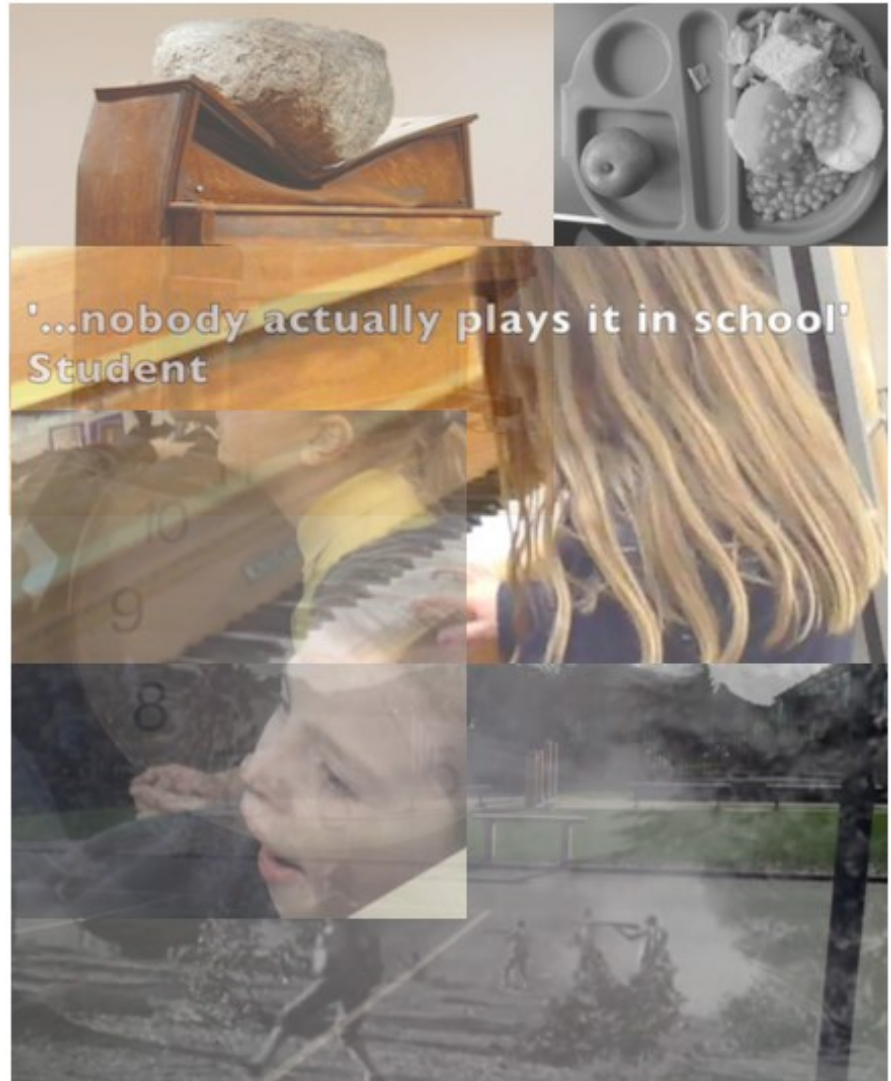
The juxtaposition of certain clips within my research film has served to ensure that these images recorded by the children do not get lost within a wider body. Instead they are designed to get the viewer to notice the everyday aspects of school as seen through the eyes of the child. The contrast and at times extreme images that I have used are there to emphasise the points and create a reaction in the viewer.

The iron railings, locked doors, fire hydrants and subjects enter into a complex assemblage. In enabling the school students to be expressive, both orally through the discussion, and visually using film, we have started to explore how the flatter ontology as explored through new materialism may exist. The children do have thoughts about safety in school and these seem to contribute to a becoming-atmosphere. The fire hydrant in particular seems to have a fearful vitality whilst other objects contribute to an apathetic attitude towards safety. The assemblage operates at multiple levels – from individual pupils and their feelings through to an institutional and political scale. The film attempts to grapple with these issues for an educationalist audience to begin the process of thinking about these every day, lived aspects of school life. I purposefully resist seeking stable and pragmatic ways to negotiate the meaning of school safety. Instead the purpose is to shine a



light on hidden issues to encourage school staff and indeed children to bring affective aspects of school life, such as safety into focus.

**Assemblage II: “The plastic compartmentalized food trays, the ‘un-played’ piano, the conflicted playground and the ‘comfy blue chairs’”**



**Assemblage II**

The ‘un-played’ piano became a point of fascination as I began to collate the film data that the children had collected. When asked to film the affective aspects of their school so many of them had filmed each other playing the piano. It screamed to me how important this cultural artefact was for them, and I imagined children spending joyous moments singing around this piano. This was revealed as untrue as part of the interviews where we watched the raw footage together in small groups and it transpired that the piano was never heard in school. It was silenced by the lack of a competent pianist and superseded by the digital music player,

offering an alternative way for the children to sing during assembly. Their motivation for playing the piano on film appeared to be linked to the freedom that the filming had afforded them and the opportunity to explore their school. There was clearly a curiosity around the piano and an opportunity was taken to play it. The discordant pieces that were played as an abstract tune became a recurring and slightly haunting theme as I explored the raw data. The children had given the voice back to the piano, turning it from a dusty institutional-traditional artefact to something that could once again sing its tune.

***He entered the hallway through the 1930s front door with the stained glass in a small ellipse shaped, letting in only a fraction of light into the small hallway. As always, he hid behind his big sister as the piano teacher threw her long grey ponytail over her shoulder. The front room was where they played the piano. Stuck in his memory though are the hands of the teacher. Wrinkled and almost frozen in position she would take the manuscript and add the pencil markings, showing you which finger to play the note with. The occasional mistake rubbed out by the eraser at the end of the pencil, then theatrically brushed away onto the carpet. The dry and cracked arthritic fingers moved purposefully across the page. A fear existed when there was nothing really to be scared of. He never spoke.***

The fragments of this assemblage speak particularly of the research school and the discourses and practices that exist there. The school dinner trays that were filmed though are fairly ubiquitous in all schools. The film helped me to actually see these for the first time as these were not something that had previously caught my attention. Like Assemblage I these trays instantly brought to mind the other institution – the prison. These images were made starker when I was searching film archives and saw school lunchtimes within the period between approximately 1920-1955. The old clip that I selected as part of the final film showed a mealtime where children sat together and served themselves from the centre of the table, using a proper plate. These two images, the modern and the old, seek to question the everyday practices of school lunchtime. To enable the viewer to (re)think what the purposes of lunchtime may be and how these might contribute in affective ways to the school atmosphere.

'Being naughty' and 'being poorly' are associated with the comfy blue chairs that exist in the school entrance hall – a duality of meaning and yet still somewhere you would not really want to sit. The only clue to the reason that you are there might be the presence of a 'sick bucket' or the remorseful face. Here you may await the gaze from the staff exiting the staff room or the headteacher from their office. They had transcended their functional role as something to sit on, and seemed to create their own sense of agency and meaning. In one sense they seem to be atmospherising that space in the school entrance area. They had an ability to render it as ethereal with the pupil needing to play their role, depending upon the reason for them being in the chair. They had become more-than-chairs.

Finally the violent sounds from the playground form part of Assemblage II. Rather than laughter and talking, the sound seemed to be dominated by shouting, screaming and discontent, with phrases such as 'get off the ball' and 'it's my turn'. My decision to link this violence with a military image of soldiers aims to emphasise the violence of the playground. This echoes some of the research by Holmes (2016) who described the conflict and gender stereotyping emerging from film images of a game of 'kiss chase,' which she terms 'dogfight'. This space...the dominating grey concrete of the playground...appears coded to be an environment where transgressions takes place. The watchful eye of the 'midday assistant' isn't enough to control and regulate the behaviour of everybody. As this gets merged into a cacophony of sound it is only the shrill and loud that appears to stand out.

Throughout this assemblage appears to be a constant vibrancy of intensity whereby the objects recursively frame the child as collective-individual-collective-individual. The 'institution' of school also moves through history as it is shaped and the purposes of education are shifted, such as lunchtime becoming a space of mess and chaos within an otherwise ordered and controlled environment. One minute the child is a collective, sitting in the assembly singing along to a backing track as the dusty piano glows in the corner. The next moment you are an individual as the child sits on a blue chair vomiting into a plastic bucket. Throughout these matters I can feel the atmosphere ebb and flow and the school environment appears to ooze feeling. Indeed without this affects I do not know what the school becomes.

To move freely – to run along the beach tasting the salty spray caught in the wind, to dance wildly and feel the beat of the music run through your body as body and music become one, to read passionately, wiping away your tears, unable to quite put the book down. These affective elements of this movement speak to me about this assemblage.



During the data collection I was particularly interested in the dancing feet which some of us noticed as we looked for matter(s) to film. Of course the children were not dancing but most children were seen to be moving their feet. This showed how the idea of 'sitting still' has become an important, yet misplaced part of a learning

discourse, since the children seem to need small movements. This was not something that got in the way of learning and yet it needed to remain hidden. The tensions in the performances of sitting still and being a good learner, emerged as a sub-plot to the acts that were filmed.

The classroom chair added to the screenplay in causing me to think about the choices made when selecting the classroom furniture. I wondered if the discomfort from the hard, blue, plastic chairs would contribute to the dancing overture. Would the chairs' comfort levels somehow relate to their suitability within a learning environment or was the choice driven more by cost, durability and their status as 'wipe clean'? The 'proper learner' might sit still at these chairs, with alternatives, such as sitting on the floor or standing, dismissed as unsuitable or improper. Within the university setting that I teach in, our new building has chairs that have padded seats and backs, causing me to question how relevant the different designs of chairs are. This strikes me as another form of everyday practice and educational discourse that often goes unquestioned. The encouragement of such questioning is actively sought within this research project.

In this assemblage I am particularly interested in the organizational features of the school environment. I became interested in how the 'setup' of the classroom would link to teaching and learning, striving to explore the everyday, unquestioned practice. I was interested why in this school sitting on a blue plastic chair was deemed to be the most conducive to learning. How did the elements of practicality (durable, cleanable), cost and comfort link together? I believe that the school chairs may have been chosen because they were value for money and colourful, with little thought to how this would link to pedagogy.

***Through the small, leaded, rectangular glass panes of the classroom, he spies the bees entering and leaving. This always fascinated him and caught in the moments of the daydream he would drift off to watch this flight. No air traffic control was needed to regulate this buzzing airfield. The sounds of the teacher drift in and out of consciousness. The classroom always a happy place for him. The 70s named classmates of Stephen and Sam, and Jane and Samantha able to still be visibly evoked all these years later.***



The tools for the job, add to this assemblage with the frozen image of the table equipment. This again frames learning in a certain way...suggesting that what is needed to evidence learning is your pen or pencil. The importance of having these nearby and to hand, is implicit within the image – there is no chance to ‘waste time’ in the classroom out of your seat getting the equipment. Whilst in many ways this is a benign image, it reminds me that the nature of schooling today is one dominated by assessment, evidence and high stakes testing.

**The building is alive....**

**This weekend I was teaching on a Masters programme, which started early on the Sunday morning. A series of events took place which made me believe that the building was alive and had its own agency.**

**On arrival, I was unable to use my staff card to swipe into the offices and closed doors of the building. I got a visitor pass imagining that my card was malfunctioning. But this didn't work and as colleagues arrived we realised that the building didn't officially open until 11am. Facilities staff seemed unable to overcome the issue. The building wasn't going to let us get into our offices. Teaching materials would have to wait.**

**Later I walked through the deserted office, which was something that I would do on most days. I was struck by the way the automatic lights came on and the room seemed to creak and groan. It was like the building was trying to talk to me. In its deserted state it knew it would be heard above the everyday movements and sounds of the staff.**

**I left this day thinking about the building in a different way. It had made itself noticed!**

**Research Journal Entry 30/10/16**

This leads to a sense that the affective nature of schools is rendered as relatively unimportant. It doesn't matter how children experience schooling if they reach the 'required' standards of attainment.

The banded books evoke such power and control. I began to ask children about these. It became apparent that those who spoke positively about the book bands were the ones who enjoyed reading and therefore enjoyed being able to visually see their progress through the scheme. I asked them what it must be like for children that don't like reading or that get stuck at certain stages of the book band scheme. This caused significant pauses...a jolt of thought, which indicated that most children had never attempted to consider how others would feel about the everyday practices of school life. Some children could then see that the coloured book bands possibly had a negative side. I was interested that when my eldest child started school she quickly

understood what the colours meant and was also able to assess where her colour fitted with the rest of the class. Amazingly, she seemed to know which colour book her whole class was reading. At the time her headteacher gave some sound advice, which was that 'it isn't a race...your children will get there in the end'. I think this was sage advice and yet the colour scheme seems to breed competition and for some children reinforce their inability to read as well as ranking them...imagine if you are the only child still on the (low) green band. As an adult, reading becomes something done for pleasure and it fills me with horror to imagine books being classified according to their complexity or arbitrary reading level.

Stewart writes the following in connection to the 'American Dream' describing how it 'takes the form of a still life: the little family stands beside the SUV in the driveway, looking up, stock portfolios in hand, everything insured, payments up to date, yards kept trim and tended, fat-free diet under belts, community watch in place' (2007: 52). She goes on to describe how this scene is a momentary surge, and it is charged with the unseen and the 'little acts' that dispel such a scene. These are the horror stories in the neighbourhood, the domestic violence in the house next door, the 'catastrophe, isolation and crime'.

Linking this with schools it immediately draws to mind the importance of the image of the school and the scene that is created in the classroom. This is captured in the film with the ordered and ranked reading books, the labelled drawers and general tidiness discourse within the classroom. But like this fabricated sterile image of the 'American Dream' the image of this 'perfect' school immediately draws me to the unseen horrors within the education system and in particular individual schools. The tidy and ordered classroom is designed to communicate this good school and contribute to the aspirational ethos of perfection. My experiences working in schools always root out the way that these scenes are underpinned with children that are experiencing school in a very different way to this superficial appearance. The film nods to this with the cloakroom that has fallen into disarray, with bags thrown onto the floor. One memory of my classroom teaching is of a particular child whom we just couldn't help to make progress with his reading. This was tackled with reading interventions and constant support and yet even by the end of year three his reading level existed on a reading plateau. On reflection I'm sure his experience of school was quite negative and



demoralizing and indeed the look of the school or classroom was something that was irrelevant to him.

**Assemblage IV: “The welcome signs, the mission statement, the staffroom and the offered cup of tea.”**

One noticeable feature of the research school is that they have many signs, posters and messages around the school environment. In fact, when I counted there were 11 signs that had the word ‘welcome’ from entering the main building and walking towards one of the classrooms. In one moment I found myself believing that this was good as it was starting to make me feel welcome, before I realised that these signs were more complex in their nature. However, the fact that I feel very welcome in this school is really nothing to do with the signs. It is a complex set of circumstances related to the physical environment and particularly the levels of communication and friendliness from the staff. This is an oscillating phenomenon as my role and personal history within this is also important. I had worked at the school over a number of years and had ‘proven my skills and integrity’. I had also delivered training within the school which in some people’s mind may have elevated my perceived ‘expert status’. I also have a very good professional relationship with the head teacher, who is able to trust and share information with me. I know the staff and their names. In terms of ethics then I was more than just a researcher, I was a trusted Other. In many schools I would never feel able to sit in their staffroom with the staff or ever be offered a cup of tea – a very British symbol of comfort and welcome. But in the research school I would always feel able to do that. It is probably these factors that piqued my interest in ‘atmospheres’ in the first place, as even now I am struggling to articulate what ‘feeling welcome’ might actually mean.



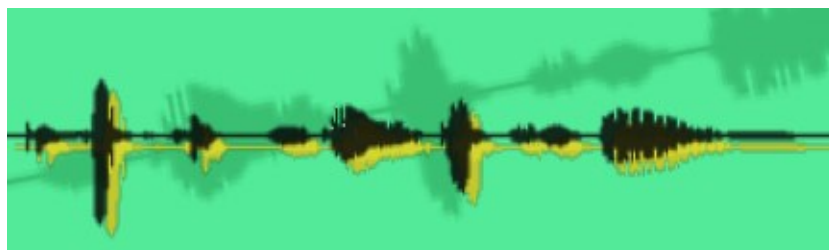
#### Assemblage IV

For the welcome signs or the 'we love reading' signs I saw that their meaning may either be lost or it may actually create resistance. The inclusion of the sign 'please keep off the grass' into the film was important to me, as these seem to create a pull inside me that makes me rebel and have to walk on the grass. Depending upon the circumstances it may be just the one step, but the sign has actually drawn attention to itself. It produces a deliberate act of rebellion as I probably wouldn't have stepped onto the grass had the sign not been there. When at high school I had a pencil case with the words 'please do not touch' written on it, and this also had the same effect. People often would touch the pencil case. Signs seem to have an affect that is interpreted differently by individuals. Their agency seems to speak to others who have to choose whether to comply or resist. I tried to imagine the child in school, who is struggling with reading and doesn't gain pleasure from it. What impact might the sign 'we love reading' have on him or her. It is positive in that it encourages them to develop this 'love,' or do children think negatively ('no I don't') every time they see it. The quote from a pupil during interview of 'they're just signs that we see and laugh at' could be a clue that the

signs have a vitality and more complex affect, experienced at an individual level, than one may initially believe.

The school also had large printed mission statements and ethos statements around the school building. In some ways these are contributing to the unique identity of the school but when I asked pupils about these sets of values it did create some confusion. When I asked what would happen when people didn't follow these sets of values, the pupils weren't sure how to respond. A similar question about what would happen if you broke a rule like not doing your homework, was more obvious to the young people. It made me think that so many systems in schools are not actually linked to the values – a good example being the school behaviour policy. The mission statements seem to act as a tick box exercise – something that the school had thought carefully about and produced at one point, but that has since lost its prominence. This would vary according to who had ownership of the ethos statement of the school, but thinking more from a child's perspective there is a need to understand and explicate the ethos much more. The large blue posters imply that the ethos has become a fixed aspect of the school but I wonder how much the poster becomes a redundant artefact – where children cease to see it anymore and it becomes something positive to be read to a new visitor to the school.

***He dreaded it. The Scottish staffroom made his Otherness stand out, adding to the deep feeling of loneliness and unhappiness whilst in this city. His 'Maleness', his 'Englishness', his youth, his status as 'student teacher' and his inability to join in the conversations. He would have loved to talk about what he had done at the weekend...but he didn't want to reveal that this amazing city excluded the single and the lonely. He had done nothing. His crowd of friends from the undergraduate days were scattered across the world.***



'Affective School Atmosphere: Soundwave' (Sackville-Ford, 2017)

Furthermore I suggest that it is incredibly difficult to stay tuned in to what a school ethos or atmosphere (if one exists) might actually be, particularly for those who are in this environment on a daily basis. Like the way that our brain is able to filter out a constant noise through the process of adaptation when you become accustomed to the noise. I wonder if for a school there is a need to constantly stay tuned in – to talk about the feel of the environment, to involve pupils, to ask visitors about their experience...multiple ways to getting just a little closer to something that is probably always going to be slightly elusive. The vitality of a potential atmosphere and the transient intensities of it, mean that it will always be a fluid and dynamic thing that one might never be able to label. Therefore it may be more desirable to avoid labelling it and instead to live it and ooze the sets of values that the school feel are important. Whilst it may be frustrating, we should acknowledge that it is like moving towards the horizon; we never quite get there as it continues to move out of reach.

## Reaching a Plateau

### Postscript

Exposed. As though I am sitting along on the Upper Lands with the wind whipping past my face, kicking dust up into the air. I stand at a student research conference reading extracts from this story. I wonder how this is experienced by others. This fantasy story from my brain is aired for the first time and it is terrifying. Their responses are invited on squares of paper in order to feed the ~~Guest~~/Guessed book.



Extract from ~~Guest~~/Guessed Book (34)

This image taken from the ~~Guest~~/Guessed book capture my feelings described above. The nagging 'devil' on my shoulder repeatedly tells me to own up...I cannot do an EdD and I am simply a fraud, pretending to be able to write. But then people tell me that hearing the story gave them goosebumps. The stunned silences lead on to people saying how good it was. People connect on multiple-levels. Some write words, some draw, some fold and some leave the page blank. It *becomes*. The reading is *event*-ful. Dare I say it, but the room full of people starts to be atmospheric.

There is a connection for many around schooling since the reading had been framed by my research title and I also showed stills from the research film as I

read the story. These are shown in the little stories, ‘at Junior school I used to imagine the broad path was a river’ (37). One person describes the school as ‘an endurance test’ (35). I am struck by an origami page, which reveals under the folds various notes and responses to the reading. Particularly I notice the word ‘Teverners’ written as though looking backwards through the word, and the way the various ‘players’ in the story are visually inter-linked through their names.



Extract from ~~Guest~~/Guessed Book (36)

Perhaps this is a clue as to how to read the whole thesis – upside down and back to front. Someone sees the connections in the writing which often struggled to hold together as one piece.

Reaching a Plateau was written intensively over a few days at a period when the main data had been collected for the thesis. Through dispersing this throughout the writing I hope to have provided points of refreshment as the reader returns to something familiar even though this fantasy world is unfamiliar. As I wanted this narrative story to have its own agency I have constantly resisting trying to ‘explain’ its meaning. I was encouraged by the research conference that this writing was not empty. It was able to have an affect on participants and this has an affect upon me.



## Enchanting Atmospheres

Returning to the Deleuzian notion of difference, explored earlier, we can consider another aspect, namely *differentiation* – that is a difference that takes place within the event. As such difference becomes a continuum and multiplicity rather than one that serves to produce separations and division. In this Deleuzian sense it is viewed as positive, since life itself is full of differentials in their own states of becoming. Difference is then creative and productive, and ‘not the differentiation of some grounding identity (humanity), nor difference *between* male and female identities’ (Colebrook, 2004: 189). Furthermore, the difference is singular as life differentiates differently within each event. This leads to a link with Deleuze’s (1994) thinking on ‘difference in each body as an effect of bodies connecting and overlapping in a relational and horizontal field’ (Hultman and Taguchi, 2010: 530).

Hultman and Taguchi’s (2010) paper uses an image of a child playing in the sand to apply the ideas of a relational materiality between matter. The child and the sand are seen to have no individual agency. Instead, the ‘agency’ emerges in-between the different bodies involved in the mutual engagements and relations: ‘muscles lifting the arm and hand which slowly opens up and lets go of the sand, which by the force of gravity falls with specific speed into the bucket, where it lands – one grain upon the other with force causing it to roll over and down and simultaneously constructing a hill of sand in the middle of the bucket... The force of gravity, the uneven foundation, the bucket and the quality of the grains work with and against’ (Hultman and Taguchi, 2010: 530). Within this event there are varying intensities, forces and speeds and the sand and girl interact and fold around each other. With a relational materialist understanding, the sand is framed as ‘active’ and ‘playing with the girl’ in an equivalent way to the way that the girl plays with the sand. Drawing in Deleuze (2004) the girl is becoming with the sand as the sand is in a state of becoming with the girl. A complex assemblage of coming into play. The differences between the two since there is no absolute border between the girl and the sand – rather there is immanence.

If the sand is unplugged from this assemblage and replaced with an ‘atmosphere’ it helps to conceptualise this relational materiality. Rather than a flow of affect coming from the atmosphere towards the girl, we can instead consider an emerging atmosphere as occurring between them. Between these two bodies



there is an immanent agency, with the forces and intensities enveloping playfully and dynamically. The child is not more significant than the atmosphere, but both non-human and human emerge as part of their entangled intra-actions with everything else (Lenz Taguchi, 2010)

### The Blue Chairs

**If mum or dad pick you up you wait on the blue chairs and if your mum or dad isn't there you sit on the blue chairs as well. You just read books and talk to the other people. You also go there if you get hurt. It is a strict place because the blue chairs are where you go when you are naughty. Once I was in reception and I was really naughty and I was sent to the blue chairs. If somebody goes past they look at you. I think I cried.**  
**Student voices – interview data**

Hultman and Taguchi's (2010) show how the identity of the child should not be considered as fixed and instead these rely on deep structures. Thus we can 'undo' the humanist subject to reduce the anthropocentric viewpoint Deleuze demonstrated how identity is an effect of events and thus takes place only at surface level. 'In the *event* the subject can no longer be understood as a fixed

being, but rather a 'way of being' – a verb rather than a noun' (Hultman and Taguchi's, 2010: 532). This 'undoing' should not mean that we cast aside the subject completely. Guattari articulates this well by stating

'[this] is not a question of anti-humanism, but a question for whether subjectivity is produced solely by internal faculties of the soul, interpersonal relations, and intra-familial complexes or whether nonhuman machines, such as social, cultural, environmental, or technological assemblages enter into the very production of subjectivity itself.'

(Guattari, cited in Philip Goodchild, 1996: 151)

Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 1994), Blaise (2013) also describes how relational materiality functions during an encounter in an early years setting when she is conducting participant observations of children. An overlapping of multiple bodies, the nonhuman and the material occurs when children interact with the researcher and touch her earrings, shoes and breast. By concentrating on the micropolitical, that is the 'small, everyday encounters as significant,' Blaise is able to think differently with gender/sexuality (Blaise, 2013: 189). For example, the unexpected boy body-child pushing the girl body-child out of the way and grabbing

her breast has to be negotiated. Here the discourses of masculinity within education need further thinking, with the female adult-body being able to challenge this rather than it being an accepted micropolitical act within this setting. These minor moments allow the relational field to shift and the boundaries become blurred between human/nonhuman, researcher/researched, gender/sexuality. This then permits research to move towards an event-like state which may permit new becomings and thought. Importantly Blaise (2013: 198) reminds us that 'working with Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concepts is useful for rethinking bodies not as discrete and separate entities, but as processes that are constantly on the move and never complete.'

This leads us to different ways of seeing, adopting more diffractive methodologies (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1997), to read an event of becoming with the data. Diffraction is best illustrated with the rolling, pushing and transformation of waves in, for example, the sea. In physics it deals with any kind of waves, like sound waves and light waves. Barad writes that, 'diffraction has to do with the way waves combine when they *overlap* and the apparent bending and spreading of waves that occur when waves encounter an obstruction' (Barad, 2007: 74). It is this movement of overlapping where the waves *change in themselves* in intra-action with the obstacle of the stone, and with each wave accumulating, which signifies diffraction. In other words, diffraction effects are effects of *interferences*, where the original wave partly remains with the new wave after its transformation into a new one, and so on, wave after wave (Barad, 2007: 71-83).

Thus when reading diffractively, seeing *with* data, the significance of *events* of activities and encounters, lead to evocative transformations and change within the performative agents involved. These include the sand-girl-play assemblage and the researcher-researched/child-adult/hand-breast-earring assemblages already described above. In diffracting the school atmosphere, this project has already found it to be a highly dynamic set of shifting intensities, that resists a fixed identity or causal relationships. Barad's ideas help to show how the intra-actions of the matter and the atmosphere leads to transformations. As such the atmosphere of the school and other bodies associated with school is signified by the differences as they overlap and envelop. Through such evocative transformations the intra-action leads to new bodies, albeit ones that are infused with what remains from before the intra-action. Each body is therefore in a constant state of *becoming*

*anew*. This emerges from this research project with the reading of the data, rather than as a research question I was actively seeking.

Diffraction in relation to atmosphere is then a useful concept and builds on the areas that I have already explored within the new materialisms. Thinking moves from being located within the isolated individual (me in relation to this thesis, and child in relation to school atmosphere) to something understood taking place between heterogeneous bodies and agents. It becomes a distributed network of assemblages of matter, organisms and meaning taking place in the encounter, rather than being about recognition, representation or everyday common sense (Colebrook, 2002). Diffraction as an act of 'seeing' and 'reading' the data is an *other* event, with readings of the data becoming emergent. The data therefore becomes playful and eventful rather than something that desires a proper reading. Diffraction then takes thinking in relation to atmosphere a step further with the atmosphere being an encounter or event, whilst the diffraction of the data also being an event.

**C6J7857 Abstract Wave. Photograph. David Orias (2013)**

This leads to an event of becoming with the material artefact of the film, (or writing or images etc.), allowing the reader to engage in the diffractive act of 'seeing' and 'reading' it. This



was an aim of the thesis in allowing the reader to become part of the encounter and as such create something new with the data. With Deleuze (1990) this is the effect of being *affected* by the idea that *thinking* exceeds us as subjects. This 'exceeding' has been part of the struggle that I have encountered in trying to understand this thesis as a body of work. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) recognize this affective force being affected by itself and influencing the subject and thinking, which then leads to transformation and transcendence. I extend this to include all matter not just that which is subject or is capable of rational thought, but all.

Anything that then engages with the ideas presented in this body of work becomes entangled with it as they see and read with it, ultimately becoming part of the data.

It is easy to see how Hultman and Taguchi (2010: 539) recognize that 'It is easy to see the connection between Deleuze's philosophy of immanence, with its decentred subject and empiricist methodology of thinking and creating new knowledge, to Barad's (2007) clear statement that knowing and being cannot be separated.' This brings us back to Barad's suggestion that thinking with ontology and epistemology as separate from other is problematic, since they are so interdependent. She instead proposes thinking as 'onto-epistemology', the 'study of practices of knowing in being' (Barad, 2007: 85). This is perfect within this thesis as atmosphere is not something that we obtain knowledge about by viewing it from the outside world. All of us, human and nonhuman, are entangled with the potential atmosphere. Thus whilst this whole project has a tendency to decentre the researcher, and indeed the reader, it takes us beyond knowledge to a position where it 'becomes impossible to isolate knowing from being and discourse from matter,' (Hultman and Taguchi, 2010: 539) since they are mutually implicated.

With the production of something new I sense an optimism in research and future research practices. There is something ethical in searching deeply through our whole bodyminds to engage with the complex flows, intensities and passages of potentialities and becomings. This ethical move allows the minor matter, to become more than something passive and immutable, and infuses it with more potentialities and recognises its agency. Bennett uses the beautiful word 'enchantment' to evoke new and previously unthought of ways to explore the world:

'Enchantment consists of a mixed bodily state of joy and disturbance, a transitory sensuous condition dense and intense enough to stop you in your tracks and toss you onto new terrain and to move you from the actual world to its virtual possibilities'

(Bennett, 2001: 111)

Enchantment within this research project has entailed exploring the child, teacher, school, researcher, in a learning event which might *become*, in its intra-activity with the surrounding world. It has undertaken a nomadic adventure at the blurred

borders (of convention or invention), often finding itself within Deleuze's virtual realms (1988, 2004) exploring the potentialities in all bodies and their inter-connectedness, always thinking alongside a notion of 'atmosphere'. It is hoped that the creative methodologies add to the intensities and vibrancy of the whole research thesis. I hope it has enchanted.

## **Coda: a beginning-middle-end**

In reaching the 'end' point of the 'adventure through lively matter', or at least that which I hope has been lively and that matters, I am left with some kind of attempt to close the piece. In the same way that I struggled to begin the thesis, I find myself stuck. Drawing inspiration from Stewart (2007) I resist calling this section the conclusion. It is not closure that is required here, but the continued explosion; for the whole thesis to have agency and to be ongoing, lived and embodied by the reader. For the ideas and discussions to be lodged within, to interact and grow with time and to be vocalised at some point. Indeed, I view this section more as a beginning-middle-ending, which attempts to pause rather than close. Instead we look back at the thesis but to also look forward to the next steps and future directions for my research.

Williams (2003: 23) suggests that a standard conclusion should be treated with suspicion as a Deleuzian approach warrants a spirit where 'it cannot be securely summed up in terms of specific conclusions about actual matters of fact'. Concrete conclusions would always invite a different repetition that would not allow conclusions to be intensified again. Indeed it is fitting as one approaches the end of a thesis to think that the intensity of it is always changing. This spirit fits well with what had always been my intention of allowing the thesis to have its own life and agency. Fitting with Deleuze's philosophy means that the way that this project holds together is methodological and structural, meaning that matters of knowledge or specific findings must always be viewed warily. Writing responsively to Deleuze's principles must always work against the fixing of the world or concepts of the world, such as 'atmospheres'.

Such a new materialism response should always seek to explore the vibrancy and possibilities opening up, and is always becoming. A conclusion then acts to close this down. Barad reminds us that the entanglements remain unfinished business. 'This moment is dispersed/diffracted throughout the paper, and this moment, like all moments, is itself diffracted condensation, a threading through of an infinity of moments-places-matterings, a superposition/entanglement, never closed, never finished' (Barad, 2014:169).

The 'lack' and 'absence' that is implied within my framing of schools should be obvious. This possibly lies somewhere between virtual atmospheres and ethics – the literally 'barren Upper Lands' and the way that the whole narrative swirls around the 'absence'. My desire throughout this writing is to draw attention to the absence and call for action even if this action is to simply notice. Within my professional context, it is about asking questions about an affective atmosphere and how these may lead to deeper thought around the way that schools are affective. This then has a direct impact around issues of professionalism for the reader.

Rather than catching the right ethos or mission I suggest that this dynamic and vibrant affective aspect of schools forms and reforms. In Deleuzian terms it is always in a 'becoming state, fluxing and being deterritorialised as various factors influence everyday practices in schools. Simultaneously as the atmosphere is deterritorialised it is also reterritorialised, becoming something else. Somewhere within this constant interplay, potential perceptions of an atmosphere may occur. These markers in the sand recognise the atmosphere as *event*. Deleuze (2004) suggests that the event of an atmosphere is *aliquid*. Therefore we can say that both 'this place has an atmosphere' and also 'this atmosphere has a place'.

Drawing again on Deleuze (2004: 63) I suggest there may not exist a causal relationship between what happens in a school and an affective atmosphere. Perhaps the materiality and agency of atmospheres transcends the school, as well as this thesis as a piece. What I have found throughout the research is that emotions and ethos are continually 'schooled'. This is problematic and I hope the agency for the reader is that they begin to act reflexively towards their own positions within this schooled context. This position has only become clearer through the process of looking back at what has passed, like Massumi's (2002) flight of the arrow, whose journey is only known once it has reached its target. I have a sense of pride in writing this thesis and my attempts to be brave and bold in my approach towards it. Like affect becoming schooled, I have also attempted to play with the concept of a doctoral thesis and doctored it. My desire is that it is a positive force and offers something new in relation to educational research. I want to release affect but in order to make that desire intelligible to the reader I have followed certain pathways and people which are there to be used. Within these I am trying to find new vocabularies.

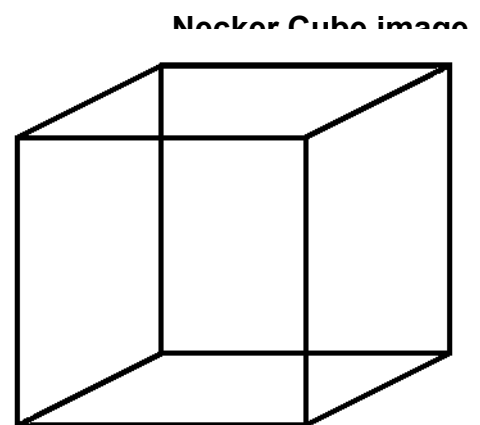


Research should intervene with the world to create new possibilities and evoke responsibilities. If we think like this, we might not just live differently, as Deleuze suggests (St Pierre, 2008), but do our research differently, in order to perhaps make it possible for others (both human and non-humans) to live differently in realities yet to come.

This thesis has allowed me to wallow and luxuriate in concepts of affective school atmospheres. This now leaves me wondering which line of flight to follow next. This is unclear to me at the moment, but perhaps it is time for me to think about action and the ways that the school atmosphere may be re-negotiated. This would be a political turn, in order to generate something more within the event, evoking acts of resistance and change. Hardt and Negri (eg. 2004) perhaps offer some inspiration here in the ways that they incorporate political theorizing whilst also drawing upon the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari.

Negri in particular serves to remind me that action can be positive despite the ongoing difficulty in finding ways to ensure the political organisation of the revolutionary subject is not lost within the emancipatory potential associated with action. In other words, the theorizing and philosophizing is not enough. Hardt and Negri suggest that 'without the active participation of the subordinated,' sovereignty must crumble (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 334). Refusal and subtraction are examples of revolutionary acts of resistance. The inclusive concept of the 'multitude' is used to consider a movement of diverse figures in social production. The multitude has the potential to rupture the status quo in education by producing a revolutionary event.

Whilst these ideas are in their infancy, I feel there is an optimism here. This can lead to acts of productivity and creativity with the multitude, acting like a Gestalt switch. That is shifting our gaze on school atmospheres in a similar way to the Necker cube; which is able to be seen in different ways depending upon which front face you concentrate on. These suggestions float in my mind.



I start to consider the ways that a multitude of biopower might think with the affective nature of schools; the ways that schooling and education may be philosophically turned on their head. How one might flip the vibrancy and potentiality of the learning environment in to one that actively resists the neoliberal machinery of high stakes testing, accountability and de-professionalism of teachers. I wonder what acts of violence are needed and how children can be active participants in these resistant acts. And what happens after the revolution? Maybe the concept of 'love' used by Negri becomes part of this, as we begin to find new ways of living.

And this is why this section cannot be the conclusion. There is too much work to be done. It is a complex and difficult pathway and one which goes off into the darkness. For you, the reader, you too have difficult decisions to make. What direction will you go in? You might choose to come with me and join the multitude. To continue this adventure through lively matters.

### **The Trees**

The trees are coming into leaf  
Like something almost being said;  
The recent buds relax and spread,  
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again?  
And we grow old? No, they die too,  
Their yearly trick of looking new  
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh  
In full grown thickness every May.  
Last year is dead, they seem to say,  
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

*Philip Larkin (1967) High Windows*

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